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Francis Bacon









FRANCIS BACON

A Drama

BY MERVYN MURRAY

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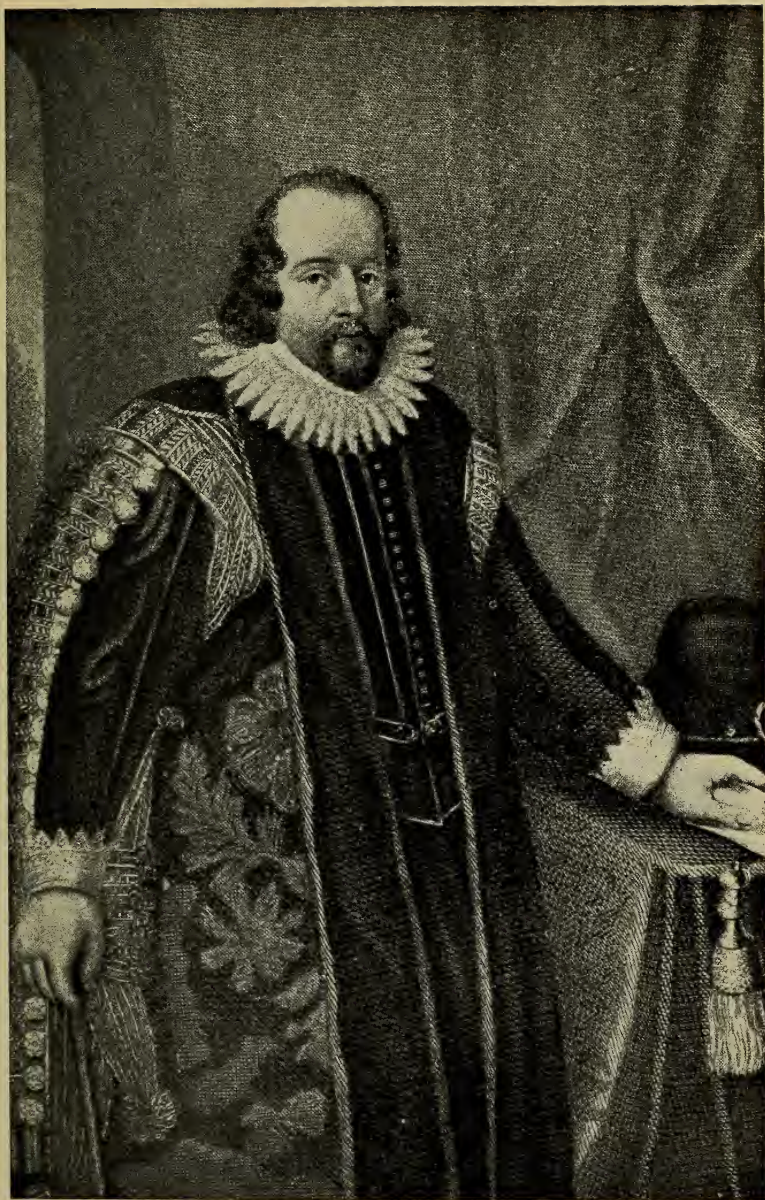
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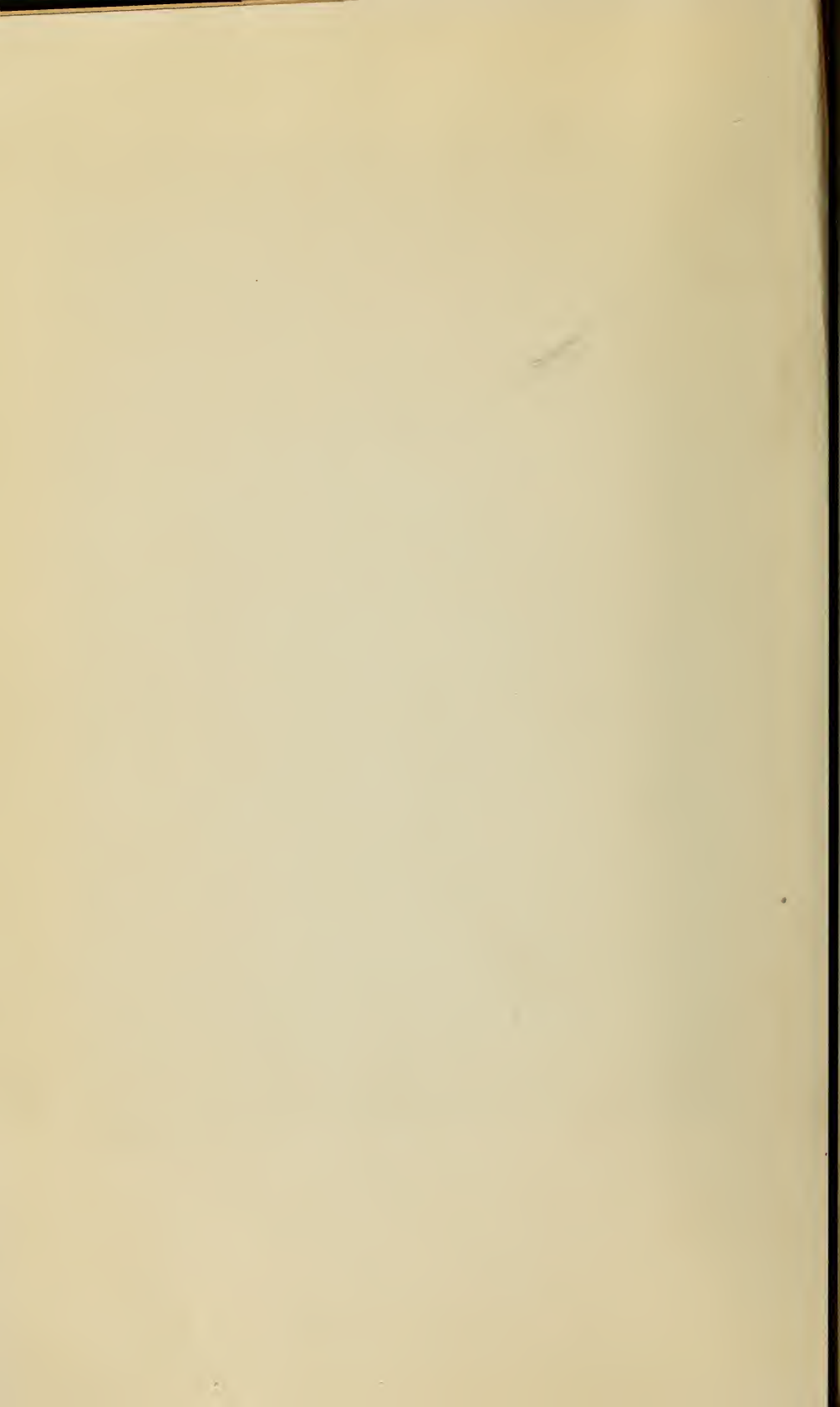
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LORD FRANCIS BACON, VISCOUNT VERULAM
(After Original Portrait in National Gallery)

Francis Bacon



Francis Bacon

A Drama in Five Acts.

Dramatis Personae:

Elizabeth (Queen of England)
Francis Bacon (Lord Chancellor of England)
William Cecil (Lord Burley), Lord High Treasurer
of England
Robert Cecil (his Son)
William Shakespeare
Ben Jonson
Sir Francis Walsingham (one of the Queen's Privy
Council)
Robert Devereux (Earl of Essex)
O'Neill (Earl of Tyrone)
Lord Deaconsfield
Sir James Saxondale
Sir Frederick Neville
Meyrick
Blount
Costello
Monteagle
A Physician

ACT I.

SCENE I. In the apartments of the Lord Treasurer, in
the Queen's Palace, London.
(Enter Lord Burley and Robert Cecil)

Cecil:

My lord, when I passed by York House today
I met my cousin Francis, just returned
From his long stay abroad.



Burley :

Why comes he here?

Cecil :

He said he came through changes brought about
By the Lord Keeper's death.

Burley :

What said he else?

Cecil :

He said he yet will make the world admit
That Aristotle's theories were false.

Burley :

A pampered horse is tamed by lack of oats.
This Francis has no means by which to live.

The mortgage deed of which his father spoke
By which he placed a charge on his estate
As annual pension for this boy's support,
Has not been found—

Cecil :

But you, my lord, will save
Our brilliant kinsman from such narrow straits;
I trust we may, for I have loved him since
I saved his life, at peril of my own,
That summer day upon the river—

Burley :

No!

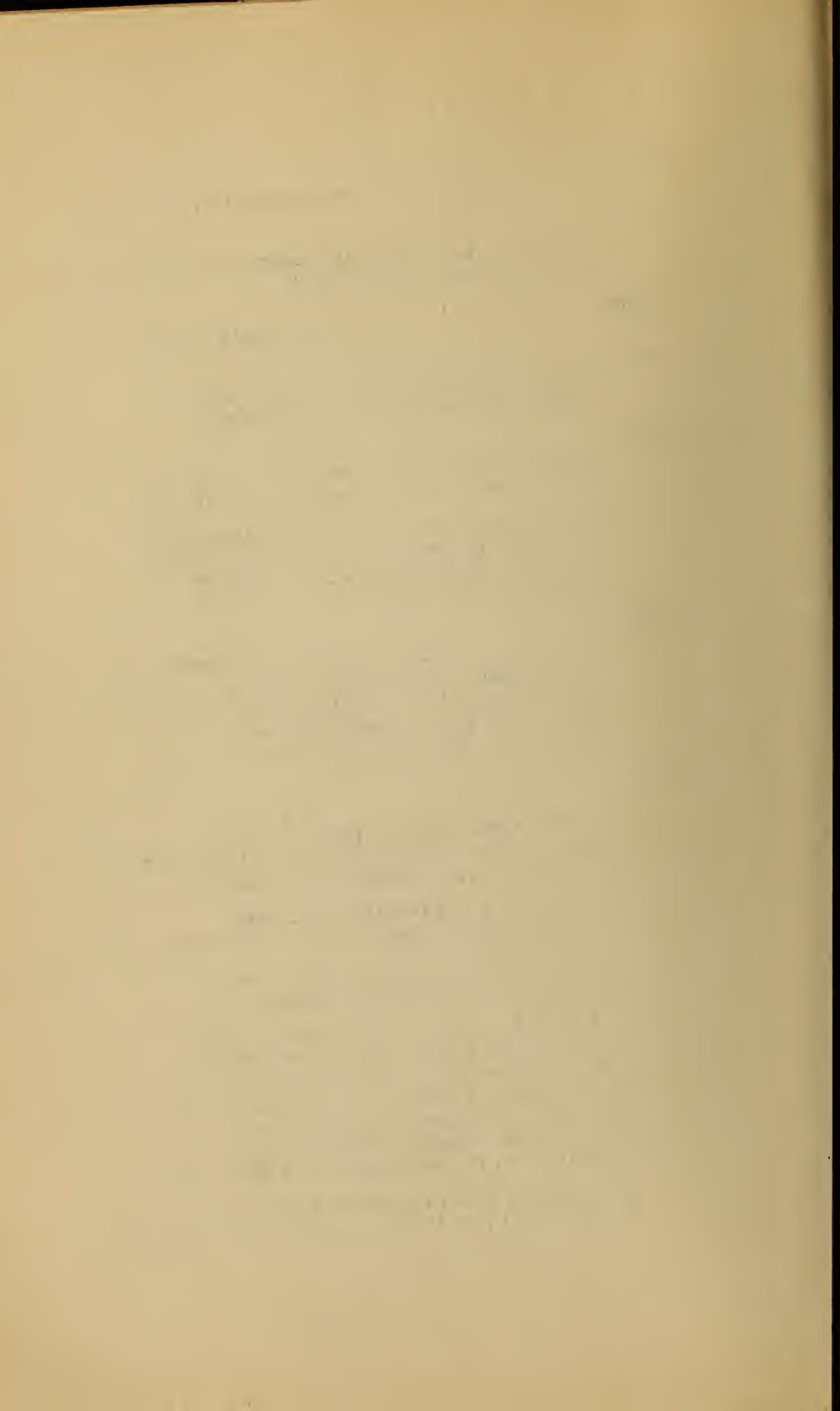
He is too deep for us to put in power.
For if he once should climb close to the throne,
He would become more strong than all of us.

His crafty brain is fuller of all guile
Than is a serpent's trail of crooks and turns.

Her Sacred Majesty is wondrous wise,
But woman is caprice's other name.

If she came under Francis Bacon's spell,
Young, handsome and magnetic as he is,
We Cecils might raise cabbages in Kent,
Or place the Atlantic between us and harm
By self-exile to lands beyond the sea,
Where Indian villages send drifting smoke
Up through the tree tops in Virginia glades.

He was born with the instinct to command,
And craves to rule like song birds crave to sing.





ROBERT CECIL, EARL OF SALISBURY
(After Original Portrait in National Gallery)



I have built up, through days of toil and stress
And nights when care propped my eye-lids apart,
Power in this realm next to that of the Queen;
And these obsequious courtiers hereabout
Think of my name more often than of God's:

All this is risked, if I do not repress
This fascinating, self-assertive lad.

Cecil:

My lord, how comes it that you think so great
The peril to us from a slender youth?

Burley:

His bosom is the breeding nest of craft;
And, by his training at the Court of France
And close acquaintance with our greatest lords,—
Himself sprung from long lines of public men,—
He has the trade of politics by heart.

In him I see, what keen-eyed Marius saw
In Julius Caesar when he yet was young.
(Exeunt)

ACT I.

SCENE II. Apartment in York House, London.
(Enter Francis Bacon)

Bacon:

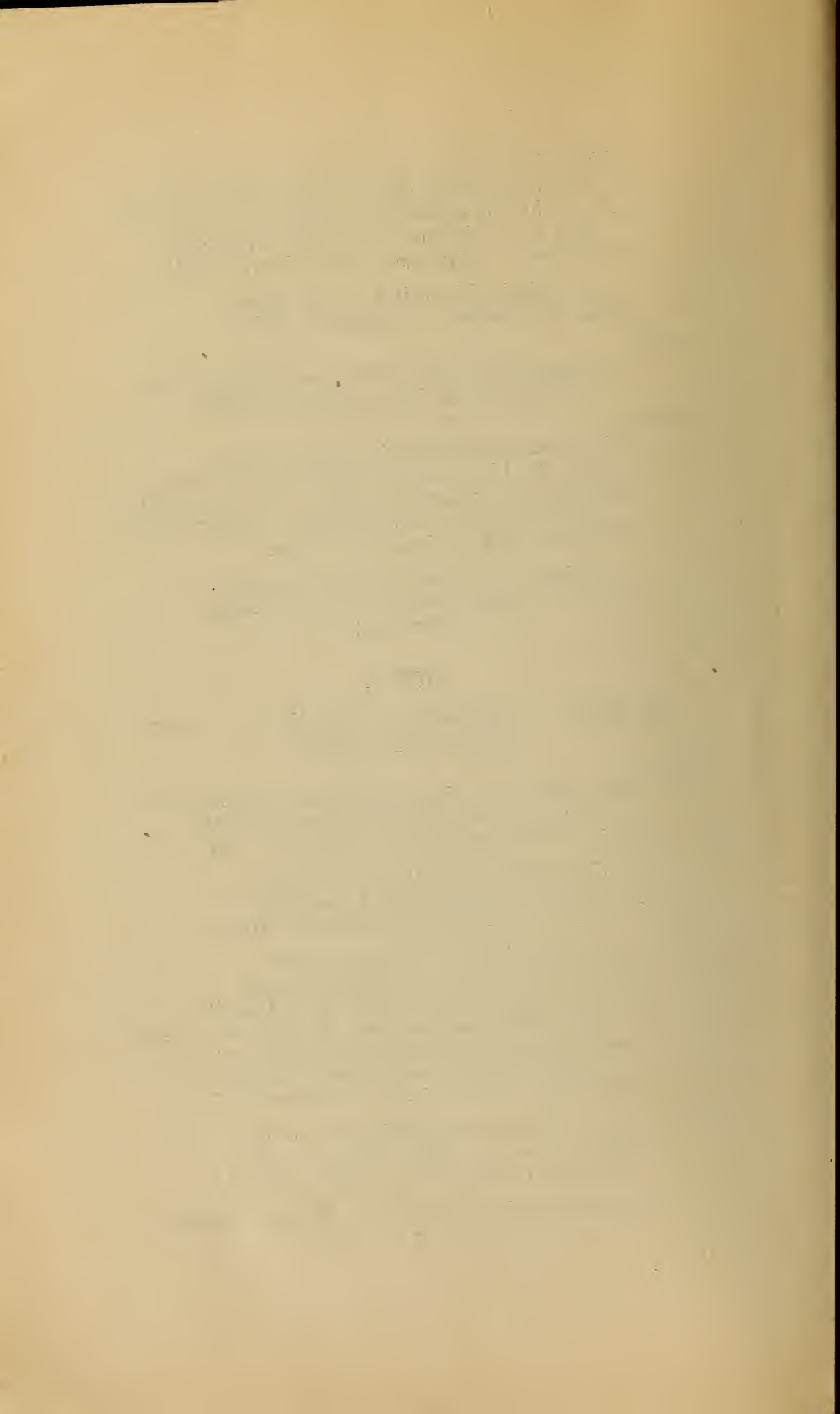
My quick return has brought me welcome slow.
My book-wise mother spoke to me in Greek,
But, in the way of love, no single word.

My brother Anthony, with covert sneer,
Hints that my aspirations to be great
Are but delusions of a pauper's dream.

My declaration that I have become
A true believer in the Holy Church,
Has shocked my Lady Bacon more than if
I had turned highwayman on Hounslow Heath;
And, though she promised she would not reveal
A secret so with deadly danger fraught,
She thinks of me as Eve of murderous Cain.

Sir Nicholas declared he had by deed
Provided for my wants, but, as to me,
His will is silent and no deed is found.

All this, combined with Lady Bacon's frowns,



Revives old doubts if I can be her son,
Or whether one of loftier rank than hers
Cast me as jetsam to the changeful tide.

But it is dangerous to think of this—
The headsman's axe is the most usual key
To lock up private secrets of the Queen.
(Enter Lord Burley)

Bacon :

My lord, permit me to express the hope
That weighty cares of State do not oppress
Your valued health or wear upon your strength
More than your loving relatives might wish.

Burley (pompously) :

'Tis well, my nephew, that I still am here
To hold the ship of state on even keel :
Your honored father sooner did succumb
To burdens which we public men must bear.

Bacon :

And yet the labor is a glorious task
Which makes us rulers of our state affairs,
And raises us above our fellow-men
To be next in importance to the throne.
To rule is God's prerogative ; and when
We rule, we thereby come to be like God.

Burley :

Ambition is a passion more of hell
Than savoring of Godhead. It is more
The whispering of the demons of fierce greed—
Of slant-eyed envy and of sly revenge.

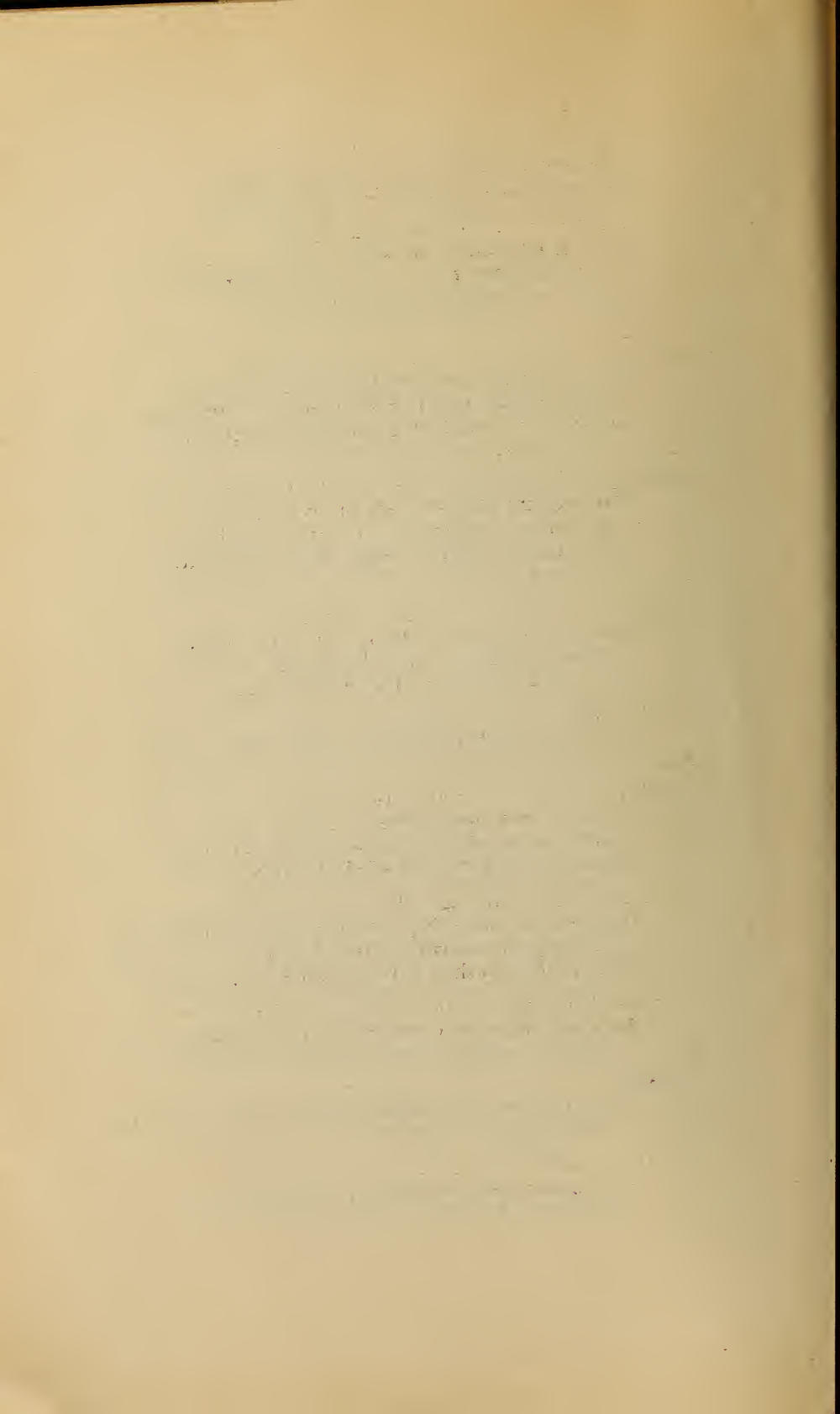
Between the whirling mill-stones of the fates,
Grinding the world's grist, as kings rise and fall,
The sterling virtues which ennoble man
Take flight, abashed before encroaching vice :

Seek then some cell scholastic and rejoice
That you can read your life away in peace.

Bacon :

A book-worm is a mental suicide,
Who drowns his minds in thoughts by others
penned.

My former plans must now be all recast ;
And since I have not present means to be



A self-crowned sovereign in the realm of thought,
I'll train my wings to fly on lower planes
And scheme a road to greatness among men.

I am now nearly twenty years of age
And know how politicians play the game;—
'Tis chess, with all of Europe as the board,—
And men the pawns the players move at will.

I speak Italian, French and Latin well,
And so could serve Her Majesty abroad.

I beg that you, my honored uncle, will
Exert for me the influence you possess
And see that I be favored by the Queen
With an appointment suited to my worth—
Some diplomatic post would meet my wants
And be my first step to a higher place.

Burley (pompously):

'Tis empty, vain and frivolous to woo
The shifting winds that blow at royal Courts.

If you will change your residence to France,
And bind yourself to stay beyond the seas,
I'll furnish you each month a modest sum
For student's raiment and for student's food;
But this assistance I shall not extend
If you will dabble in the filthy pool
Of politics—

Bacon:

I see you care for me
More than you do for your own flesh and blood.

Burley:

Why say you so?

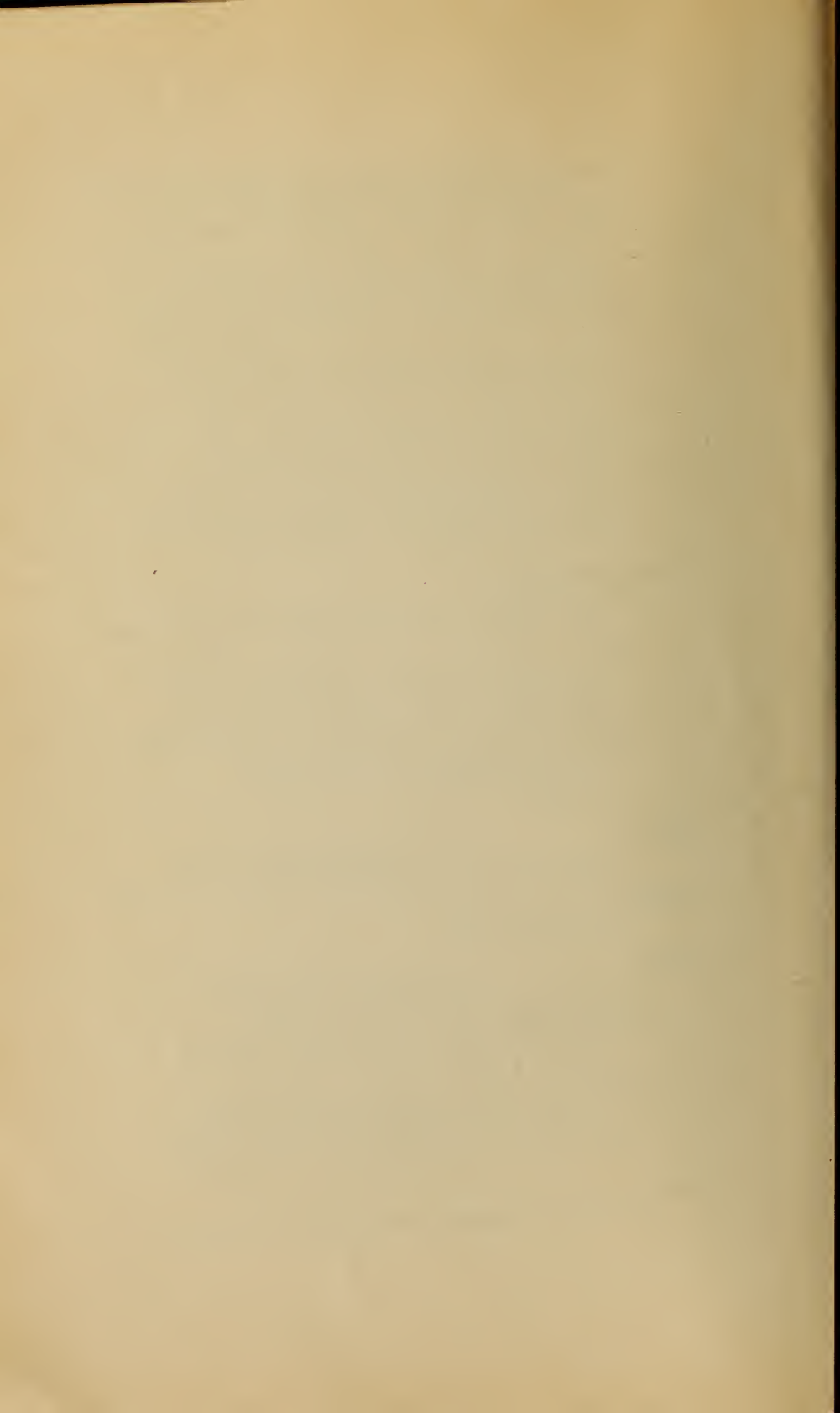
Bacon:

Because this unclean pool
Of life political, which you declare
Is too impure for Francis Bacon's feet,
You've led your own son into by your side.

If you call me too good for such pursuits,
Yet introduce your son into their depths,
You must esteem me more than your own son
Or else you must be insincere throughout.

Burley:

Is this the courtesy you've learned in France,—



This insolence to kindred and gray hairs?
From henceforth you are naught to me or mine!
I beg that you will weary me no more.

(Exit Bacon)

Burley (solus):

The boy is shrewd, but knows not half the truth—
Is unaware Sir Nicholas gave me
A chest of gold and gems of royal price
To be applied to this pert lad's support.

'Tis fortunate his father never told
This save to me. In fact it is most strange
He always was mysterious as to Frank.

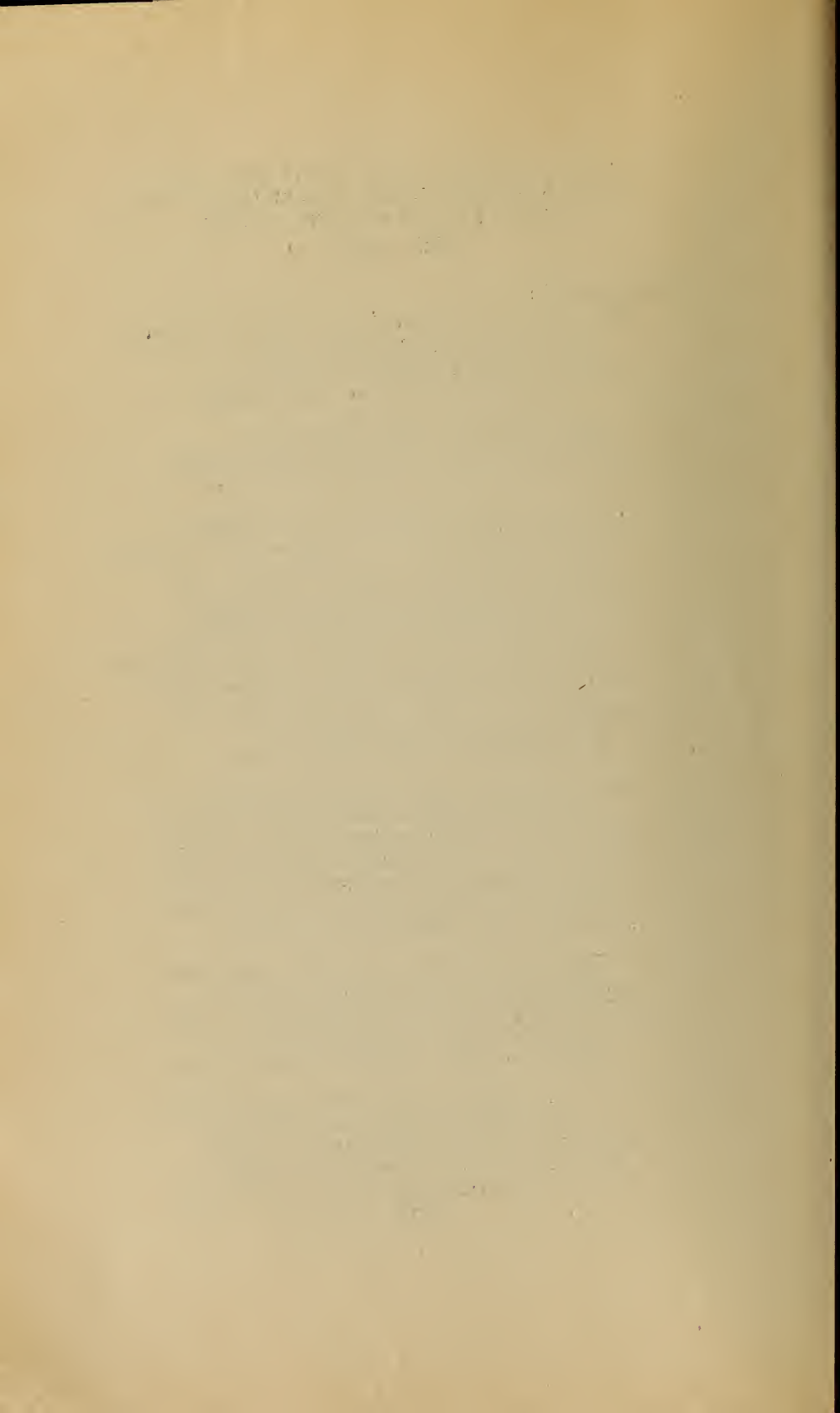
To tell it now would be to do a wrong,
For, once made rich, he'd champion the old Church
And, as an orator and writer, win
In years to come, our people's feelings back
To the old methods of religious thought,
And wean our England from its latest creed;
And thus our state-established Church might fall
And the main holdings of our wealthiest lords
Might be restored to the old owners, by
The revocation of King Henry's act
Of confiscation of the monks' estates.

Such sentiments might easily be roused—
For England still reveres the Mother-Church,
And looks on Henry as the new Blue Beard,
And deems his zeal against the ancient faith
A mere pretense to cloak his lust and greed—
E'en now the Queen keeps lit a secret shrine
In honor of the Virgin and the Saints.

'Tis well my wife, in talk with Lady Ann
Learned from her sister of his foolish sin
In bowing down his neck beneath the yoke
Of papal rule from paganistic Rome,
Because he loves a princess of that faith.

I serve my God and serve this realm as well
In saving Francis from such evil course
By keeping him so handicapped by want
He will not have the spirit or the time
To pull, like Samson, his foes' columns down.

(Exit)





WILLIAM CECIL, LORD BURLEY
(After Original Portrait in National Gallery.)



ACT I.

SCENE III. Apartment in York House, London.

(Enter Bacon)

Bacon:

The lack of hope within and friends without
Has chilled my bosom like wind from the Alps.
Save that my fate would wound one tender heart
Which bears my image as its love-crowned king,
I fain would wed me straightway unto death—
The grave my marriage bed—my sword the
priest.

Our lives are ours, as Brutus said of old,
To be retained or cast away at will;

And Anthony, when he had lost the world,
Made his own sword the gateway of escape;

And the great Carthaginian summoned death
To draw its veil between himself and Rome.

But my sweet princess hovers o'er my thought
And beautifies to me the earth she treads.
For her dear sake I'll strive until the end;
I'll take all knowledge for my province; then
Her royal relatives can not denounce
Her English suitor as beneath her rank;

For genius exercises God-like sway,
And when it finds expression through the pen
And chooses for its audience all the world,
And makes all time its age wherein to reign,
Its pen is sceptre mightier than a king's.

And yet I must turn knowledge into gold,
For gilded is the bridge by which to cross
The chasm which now separates us twain.

I know that I am not as others are—
And I know, too, the solitude of soul
Which is the price that loftier natures pay:
They walk in jovial groups, who tread the plains,
But, on the mountain top, man dwells alone.

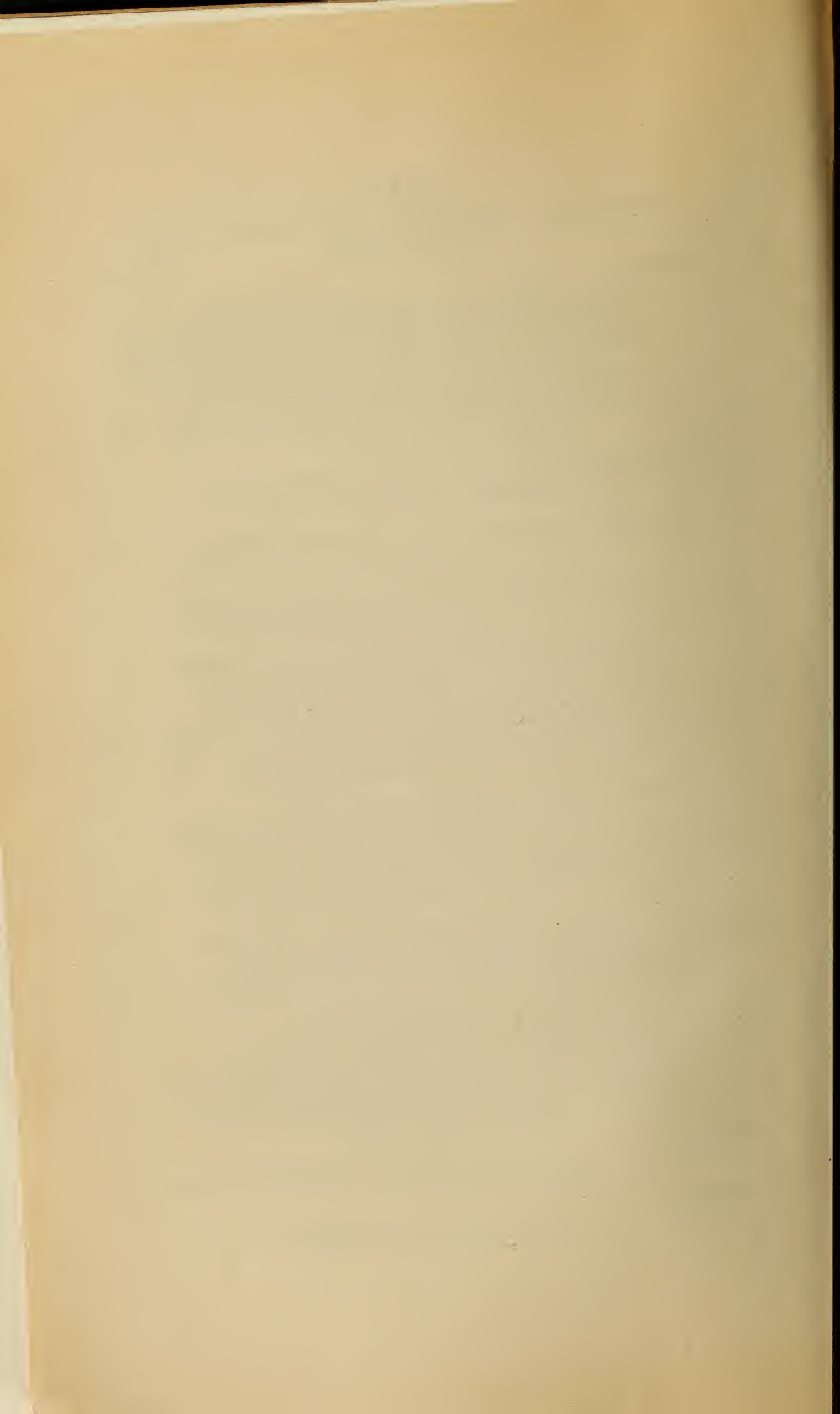
(Enter Robert Cecil)

Cecil:

Fair cousin and good friend, why look so grave?

Bacon:

I am but striving to collect my thoughts—



I must devise some means to make my way.
Positions in diplomacy are locked,
And wily politicians hold the keys.

It takes long years to make bread writing books,
But hunger visits man three times each day.

Between Charybdis of my fallen hopes
And Scylla of my raiment and my food,
There is no port left open but the law.

'Tis an inglorious ending of my dreams,—
A lawyer prostitutes his mind for gold—
Is free lance of the intellect for hire—
He swims piratically, like a shark
In wait for wrecks to bring food to his maw—
He feeds on folly, as worms feed on death.

Cecil:

You would do well to heed Lord Burley's wish
And seek seclusion in some school abroad,
Where by his help and your own splendid parts
You may in time become its honored head,
Thus gaining rank in the scholastic world—

Bacon:

And bread! Not so, for I will never sink
To be dry-nurse to undeveloped brains.
Hunger is not a Minotaur to which
My best and fairest must be sacrificed!

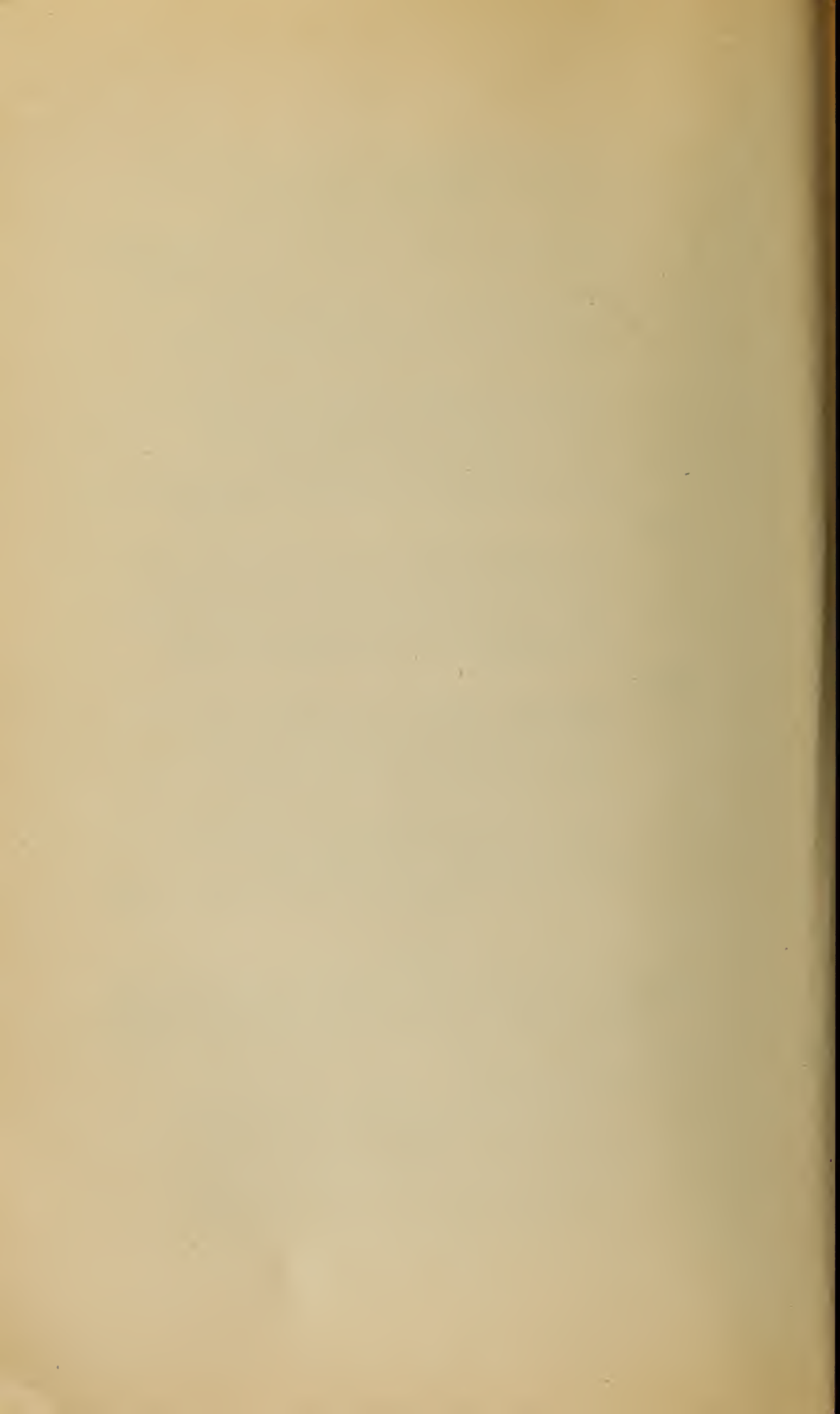
I will remain in England—surely she
Will not refuse to cherish her own brood;
For she is mother of all native here
And owes each of her offspring mother's milk.
(Exeunt)

ACT I.

SCENE IV. On the bank of the River Thames near York House. Robert Cecil and Francis Bacon walking and talking. (To them, enter Sir Frederick Neville.)

Sir Frederick Neville:

So, Master Bacon, you have been abroad
Among the slavish followers of the Pope.
My word, but I could never understand
Why old Sir Nicholas should send his son
To France, where every man is but an ape
And every woman is a thing much worse.



Bacon:

Sir Frederick, I know not what to say
To answer fitly an insult so base
To that great people who for six long years
Have been my guides in learning and my friends.
Its women are sweet poems bound in flesh—
He who says otherwise is fool or brute.

Neville:

If you compare them with our maidens here,
You are a traitor to your English blood.

Bacon:

Let us not base our quarrel on this theme,
Nor play swashbucklers over woman's name;
I have fair friends yonder in sunny France
Whom I would fain not seem thus to involve.
Which like you best, the paintings done in Spain
Or those the world owes to Italian hands?

Neville:

'Tis a strange question, but, as all men know,
The greatest painters are the men of Spain.

Bacon:

Then, in the name of Italy, I say
Your tongue drips slander and your words are
false;
And, making now no reference to France,
I'll soil my glove by this slap of your face.
(Slapping Neville.)

Cecil:

Why, Frank, why, Neville, what does all this mean?
(Bacon and Neville draw their swords
and fight.)

Bacon:

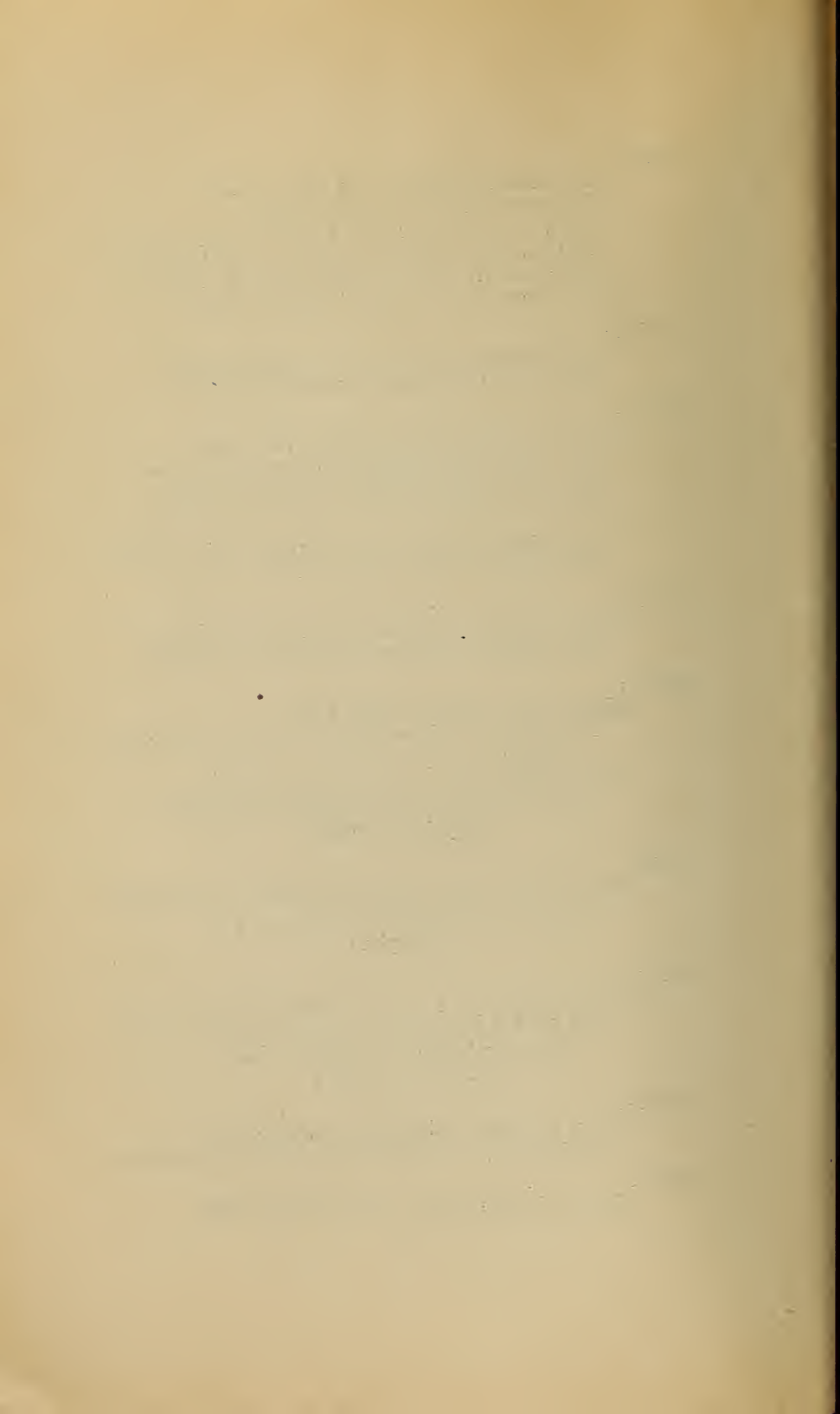
I first will wound you on the lip to show
You should keep better watch on what you say.
(Wounds Neville on the lip—they
continue to fight.)

Neville:

Before you leave this spot, you gaudy fop,
You'll wish you were in France where you belong.

Bacon:

Now I will pierce your ear to serve as sign



You should use it to heed some good advice.
(Wounds Neville on ear—they
continue fighting.)

Neville:

You should have staid with those frog-eating
French;
Roast beef breeds men, but reptiles feed on frogs.

Bacon:

I'll draw a little blood from your left cheek;
For it is red from that stroke of my glove.
(Wounds Neville on left cheek—
they still fight.)

Bacon:

I will disarm you now and end this farce;
But first I warn you that you hold your tongue:
No lady's name must ever be involved,
However slightly, by your blackguard talk.
(Thrusts Neville through sword arm—Neville
drops sword. Exit Neville.)

Cecil:

Why Frank, you practise magic with the sword.
I scarce can think that you are the same lad
Who used to say to me, in high-flown words,
That brute force is the argument of brutes.

Bacon:

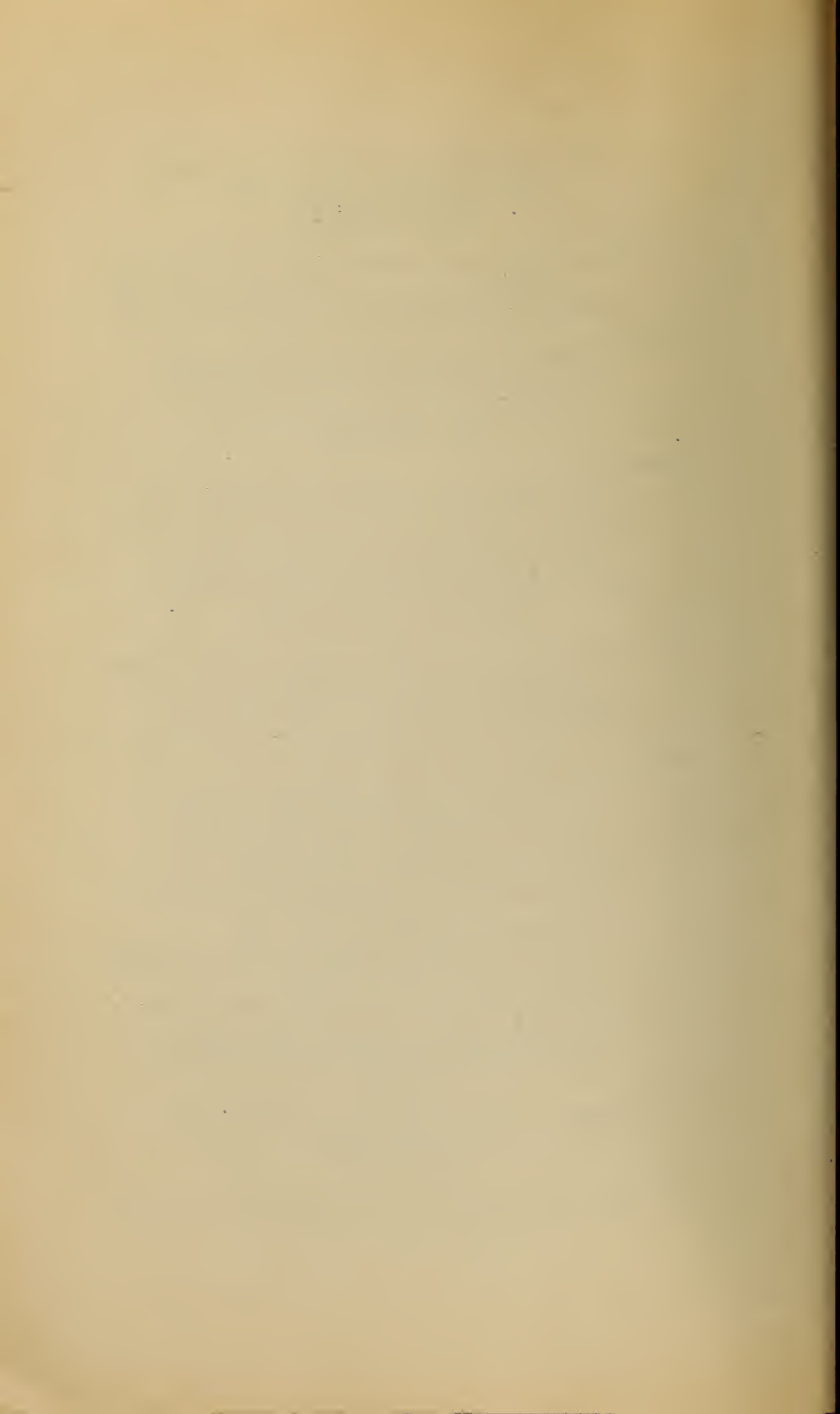
Good fencing is not brute force,—'tis fine art.
No single day has passed for many years
Without my doing some work with the foils.
My old French fencing teacher used to say
That when he dies he'll leave to me his sword
As the best fencer ever trained in France.
'Tis wholesome exercise in every way,
It keys to quickness muscles, nerves and brain,
And is a useful laying up of skill
Against the hour of need such as just now—
This world is, in some ways, a foolish world
And we must be prepared to cope with fools.

ACT II.

SCENE I. Bacon's Chambers at Gray's Inn,
some years later.
(Enter Bacon)

Bacon:

I've sowed the years at London here with hopes



And I have reaped no harvest but despair.
 Once have I, by a Jew, been jailed for debt
 But Brother Anthony bought Shylock off:
 (Some day I'll write the story in a play,
 And put the scene in Venice; him I'll call
 Antonio and myself Bassanio—
 It has Italian semblance to my name.)
 The few who visit me in these small rooms
 Are chiefly tradesmen seeking payment due
 For food and clothing which they have supplied.
 The laws of England, critically scanned,
 (A patchwork from the laws of other lands)
 Are like some mansions I have seen at Rome,
 Built hastily by hands devoid of skill,
 With sculptured blocks and graceful columns
 torn
 From stately palaces of ancient days.
 Were but my mind at rest from daily care
 Through lack of money for the wants of life,
 I would re-write some of our English laws
 Adapting them to our more modern needs,
 For no community is truly great
 Unless its laws are just and wisely kind.
 Enlightened jurisprudence is the root
 By which the body politic is fed.
 Some of the changes I would make are these:
 All men should be allowed to worship God
 According to the dictate of their wills.
 Imprisonment for debt should be repealed;
 Improvidence is not a mortal sin.
 Monopolies are merely licensed theft
 To make some courtiers fat and poor men lean.
 Entailed estates demoralize the rich;
 Inalienable wealth and vice are twins.
 No child should be allowed to work for hire,
 Lest hardship stunt the seed-corn of our race.
 No food should e'er be sold for use of man,
 Unless from all impurity found free.



The merchant class must not combine to fix
The price for goods men are obliged to buy.

The usurer should be suppressed, for he
Not only fleeces but he flays the poor.

Confessions made by men through force or fear
Should not be used as proof in any case.

Home, tools and such-like needs of daily life
Should be free from forced sale for any debt.

Kings must obey the laws, for otherwise
The barons met at Runnymede in vain.

Those hasty poems I, from time to time,
Have written to forget vexatious thoughts,
Are not without a certain sort of worth,
And, when Will Shakespeare comes to see me
here,

I will arrange with him to father them
And let them see the light as his own screeds.

This is the time at which I bade him come—
And here he is—he has a goodly look,
Though fat and clumsy for one still so young.
(Enter Shakespeare)

Bacon:
William, I hope that you are very well!

Shakespeare:
Your servant, Master Bacon; I made haste
As soon as I heard you wished me to come.

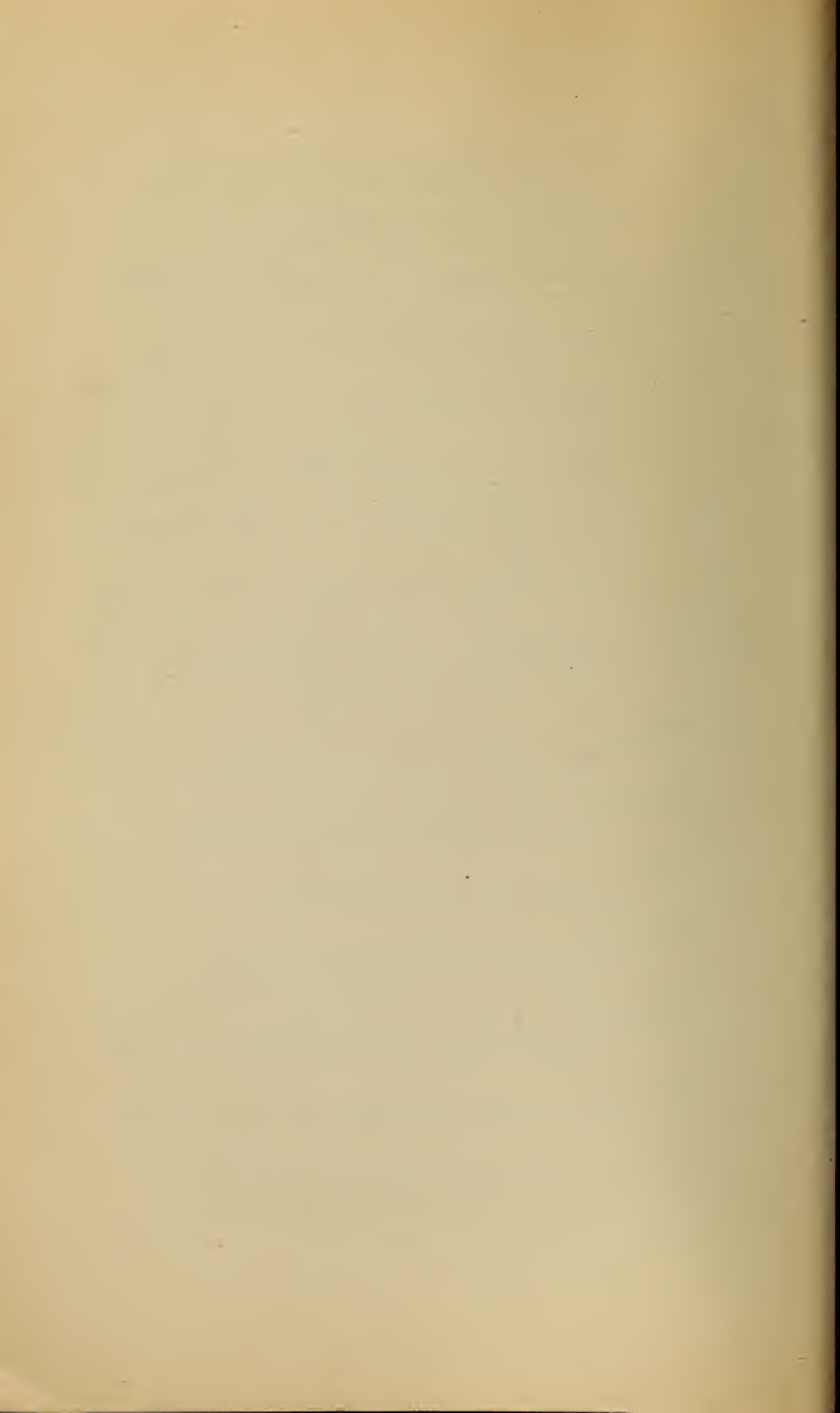
Bacon:
Pray tell me if the world be kind to you?

Shakespeare:
I have made money since I came to town,
And let it to the actors on pawn loans.

Bacon:
Whence came you when you journeyed to this
place?

Shakespeare:
From Stratford, home of pigs and fleas and smells.

Bacon:
One can use pigs for food, and nimble fleas
Keep people busy and make them forget



Their cares, including smells—Fortunate burg!
But, waiving jest, why did you leave your home?

Shakespeare:

My father and my mother did not care
To educate me, and I left the school
And then took up work in a butcher shop.

The company I kept was not the best—
'Twas drink by day, and stealing game by night,
And courting girls at all hours. Like a fool
I let them force on me a wife too old
To be a pleasant mate for one so young:
And she took my bad habits for a text
For sermons to my every waking hour
And even while I slept, for many a time
I fell asleep the while her tongue wagged on
Tolling disaster like a lighthouse bell.

Bacon:

Was she not true and an industrious wife?

Shakespeare:

Her industry was chiefly bearing brats:—
Before I was of age, three squalling imps
Made it a task to sleep and pain to wake:
Twins are too many for a poor man's lot.
Since then I've had no other lawful child.

Bacon:

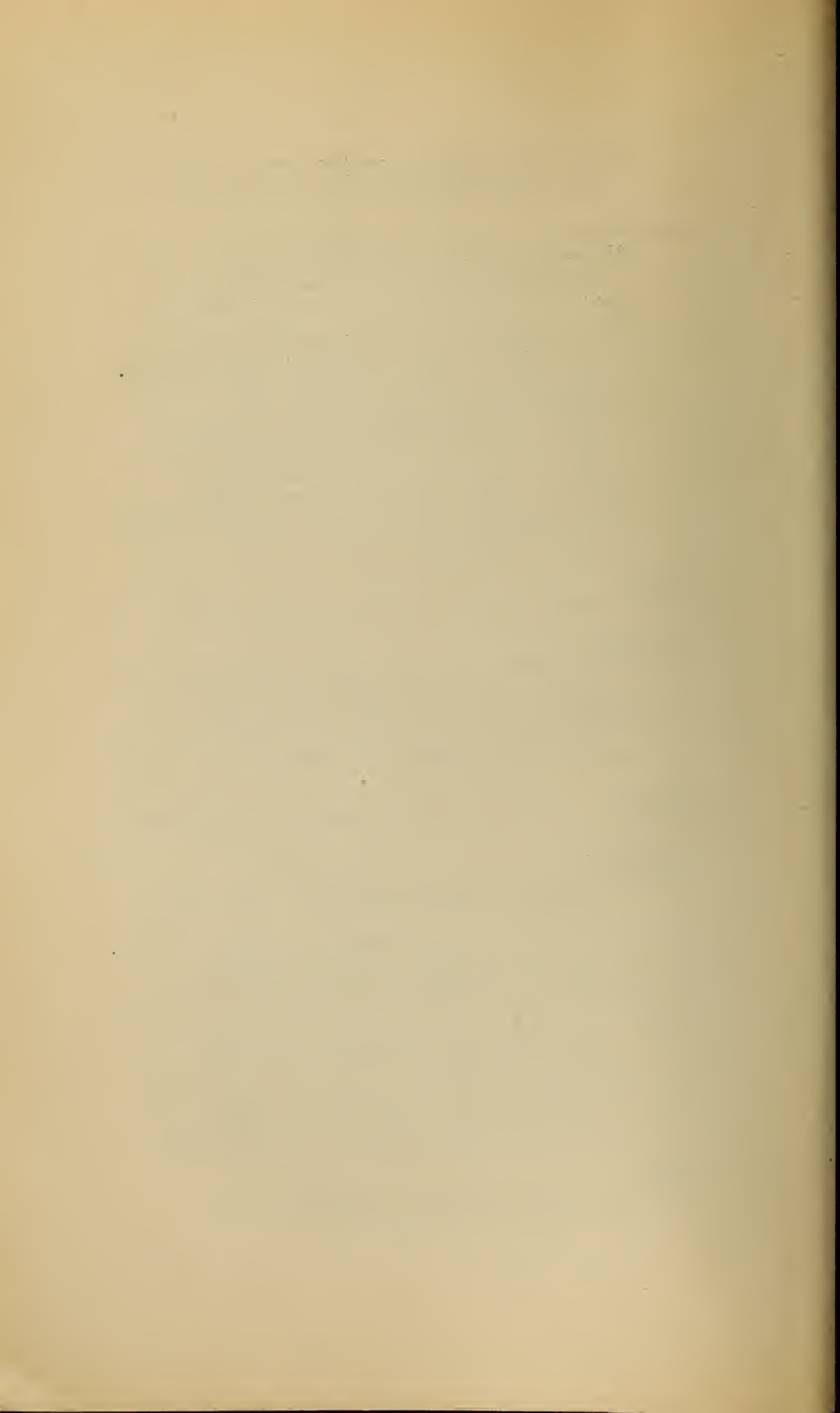
Did you not love your helpless flesh and blood?

Shakespeare:

I think that I recall I thought one day
Susannah looked right pretty in her sleep;
But I am not a family man nor wish
To be tied down, nor am I one of those
Willing to work like a French galley-slave
To bring up children, while I stint myself.
I can't get money from men yet unborn
So future ages don't deserve a thought:
When we are dead, none care for us but worms;
So I'll let others populate the world -
Or, at least, dodge the burden husbands bear.

Bacon:

Why came you here to London?



Neville:

I admit
'Twas partly to be rid of my wife's tears,
And partly to make money, but the most
Important object was to make escape
From old Tom Lucy and his Charlcourt gang.

Bacon:

I've heard you had a lawless taste for deer
Which the good knight extremely disapproved.

Shakespeare:

The old aristocrat oft had me whipt
For stealing deer and rabbits from Charlcourt—
(Ann Hathaway made famous rabbit pie.)

One day, while smarting from the beadle's lash,
I joined our crowd upon a drinking bout
Against the jolly toppers of Pebworth.

They teased me with my whippings, and I wrote
A poem (for I write, and read right well
Except the long words and words writ with pen.)

The fellows thought my poem mighty fine—
And so it was, as you will see when I
Repeat it. It went something like to this:

"A parliament member—a justice of the peace
At home a poor scarecrow, at London an ass.
If Lucy be lousy, as some folks miscall it,
Then lousy is Lucy, whatever befall it.
He thinks himself great, but an ass is his state;
We allow him then but with asses to mate.
If Lucy be lousy as some folks miscall it,
Then sing lousy Lucy whatever befall it."

Bacon:

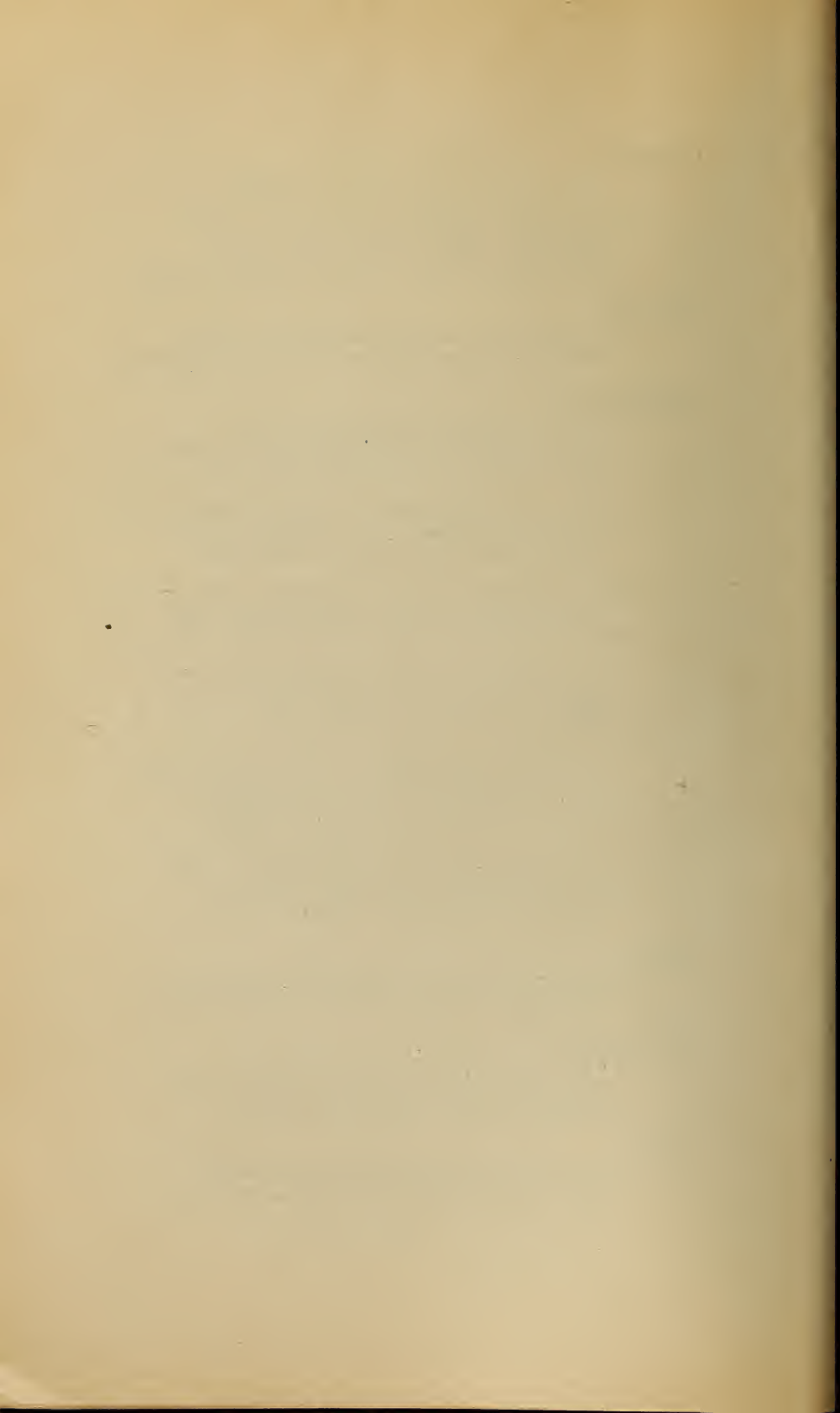
And what did you with this protesting cry
Of smarting back and beer-befuddled brain?

Shakespeare:

I fastened it upon the big park-gate;
But, when my first pot-valor was slept off,
I thought it wise to fly to other parts.

Bacon:

And good Sir Thomas—did he not resent
The violence you thus had done the Muse?



Shakespeare:

He sent me orders never to appear
Within the bailiwick again, on pain
Of the severest penalty of law.

Bacon:

Some weeks ago, Her Majesty the Queen
Commanded me, as Counsel for the Crown,
To make investigations of the rights
The Tudors have in certain Stratford lands.

In that connection, I consulted with
Sir Thomas Lucy, whom I found to be
A worthy son of his illustrious house.

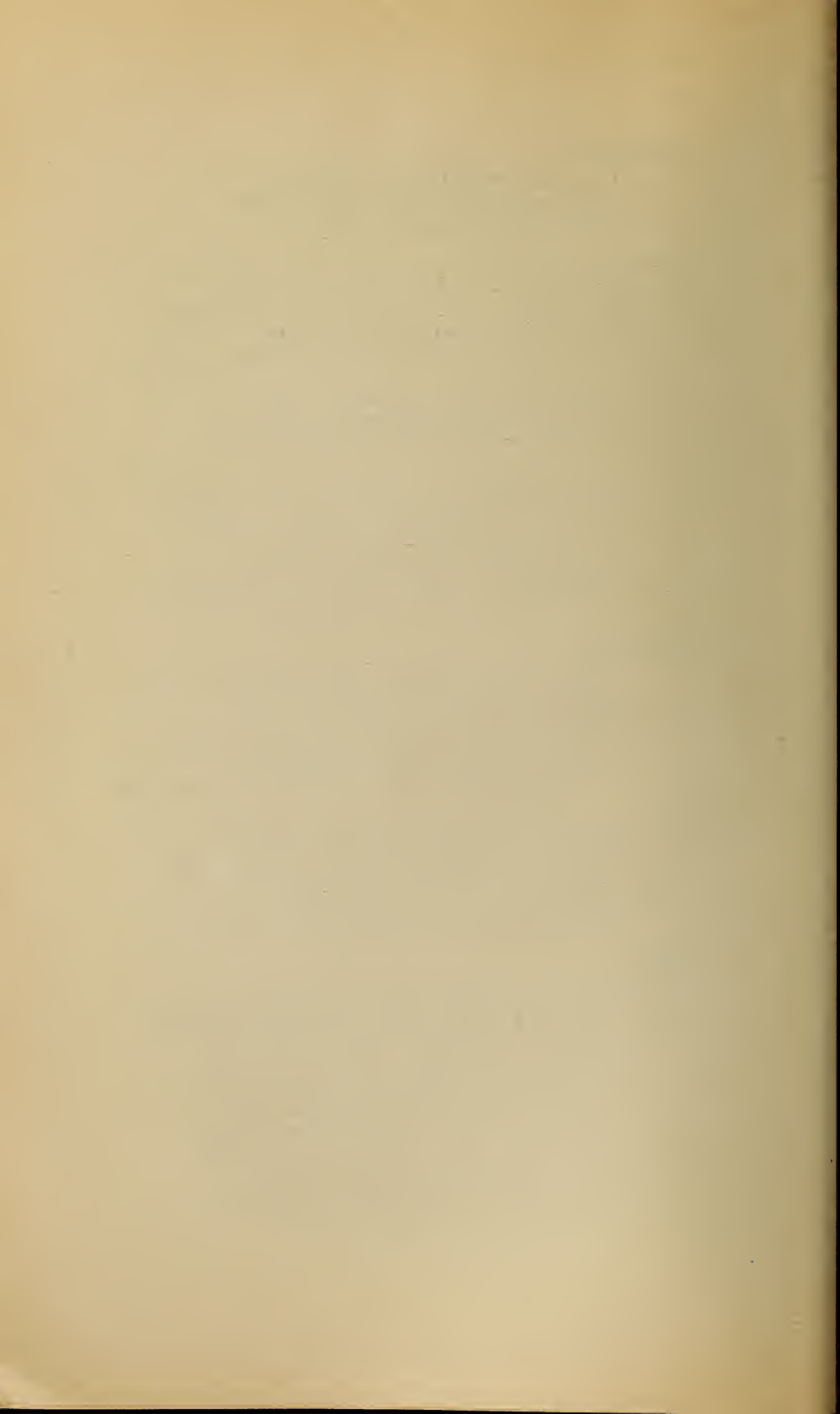
In speaking to me of the poaching laws,
He chanced to make allusion to your rhymes
As merely uncouth and malicious trash;
But, be assured, Sir Thomas is above
Schemes of revenge because of paltry slights.
I think that he will not molest you more.

Shakespeare:

I thank Your Worship. This is welcome news;
For I am getting richer, day by day;
I have boys to hold horses at the Globe;
I help around the stage and sometimes act
In unimportant parts to me assigned;
(Loaned money, like a tree, grows while you
sleep;)
And thus I have the hope that I, in time,
May go to Stratford with a well-lined purse
And make my boon companions of the burg
Look up to me as a successful man—
Though I left there to keep out of the jail.

Bacon:

I think I can assist you to increase
Your income and extend your stage repute.
You have a glib tongue and a clever brain
For money-getting. I have here by me
A manuscript composed some years ago,
A poem couched in the Italian style
And somewhat free in its licentious words
In certain ways. As barrister at law
And as a writer upon higher themes,
And as a man intending to embrace



A life political, it does not suit
That I be known as author of loose verse,
Because the masses think a person lewd
And frivolous who courts the amorous Muse.

Its subject is a legendary myth;
And Venus and Adonis it is called.
I wish to have you pose as writing it;
And, if you do not talk of it too much,
The public will not know of the deceit,

For silence is a veil that's hard to pierce—
And men oft wear it, as they wear a mask,
To keep unseen that which they wish unknown.
'Tis like the wall the timid Chinese built
To hide them while they pose as a brave race.

Shakespeare:

The most important question is the coin—
If you help me to that, the rest is clear.
As father always said: "It oils the wheels;"
And I tell you my old man was no fool—
Was alderman, although he could not read,
And the best judge of cows in Warwickshire.

Bacon:

A man of lofty rank I knew at school
Asks that the dedication be to him;
And this will help it with the higher class;
And, though the poem is somewhat too free,
His Grace of Canterbury still will grant
His leave, as censor, that it may see print;
For he was tutor to me long ago
And honors me with personal regard,
And I will ask him this in your behalf.
The book will yield some money for us both.
For we will share the proceeds of the sales.

I'll try the public taste with this, and then,
If it succeed, will furnish other works
Better adapted to your present use;
For, in my leisure hours, I have composed
Full many a play based on some well-worn tale. --
The flotsam drifting down the stream of time.

Shakespeare:

I will try anything you offer me—
A hungry man don't care what's in the stew.



Bacon :

Perhaps, good William, I may help you thus
To go to Stratford, with a well-filled purse,
And gratify the wish you entertain
To make the men with whom you used to poach
Feel envious of your success while here.

Shakespeare :

You surely found it very tiresome work
To write so much, for writing is a task :
I cannot write at all without I blot
My fingers and the scroll and all around :
My signature looks like a fly had stepped
In ink and then made tracks across the page.

Bacon :

Those dramas have been written by constraint—
While I have sleepless tossed within these rooms,
Thoughts would come flocking like unbidden guests.
And I have been compelled to write them down.

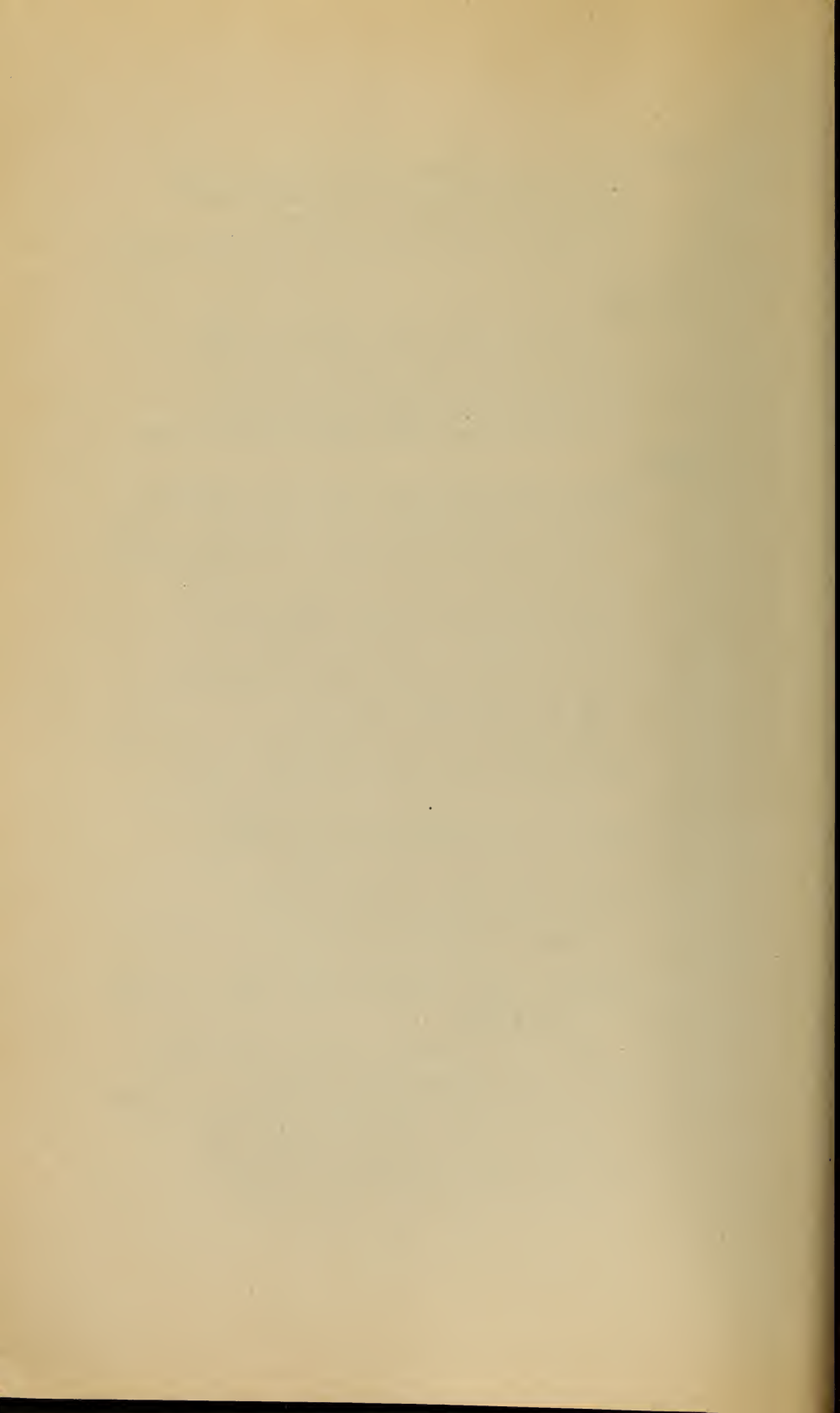
In daytime often, when my brain was tired
Of brutal laws by stupid public men—
Of harsh edicts by arbitrary kings—
If I would let my mind stray fancy free,
So many swift fantastic shapes would crowd
On my imagination, that I felt
I must express them, for they would rush forth
Resistlessly, like the volcanic flow
That surges upward from within the earth :

I seize the pen and, for the moment, I
Am the fictitious character who speaks
In the fictitious scenes of which I write.

Is it a lover whom I paint in words?
If so, I, for the time, know all love's woes,—
Its tumults, aspirations and despair.

Is it a warrior mounting to a throne
Through steps of gore? Then, my own heart
beats fast
And lust for slaughter tingles in my veins.

Is it a sage, serene and self-composed
As one by whom each luminous page of thought
Has been perused with philosophic care?
When I do write of one so calmly wise,
For that time it does seem to me that I
Am he, in real truth, whom I depict.



Do I portray one steeped in jealous doubts?
My soul for that time is a little hell
In which fell demons of vindictive rage
Do writes and gibber in convulsive throes.

Do I describe a prince whose brain is strong,
But whose irresolution makes him weak?
While I do write of him, I am that man!
My weak side palters with my stronger self;
With plausibility I make excuse
And hide inaction under cloaking words.

And even so, each offspring of my brain,
Passing in pageantry before my thought,
For me does move and breathe and take on life
With individuality complete.

Shakespeare:

If you will give me leave to use your name,
I can get fifty pounds for every play
The Globe Theatre managers will stage.

Bacon:

My name must not be used or hinted at.

Shakespeare:

Then, if the plays are given in my name,
I can get something for them, but not much.

Bacon:

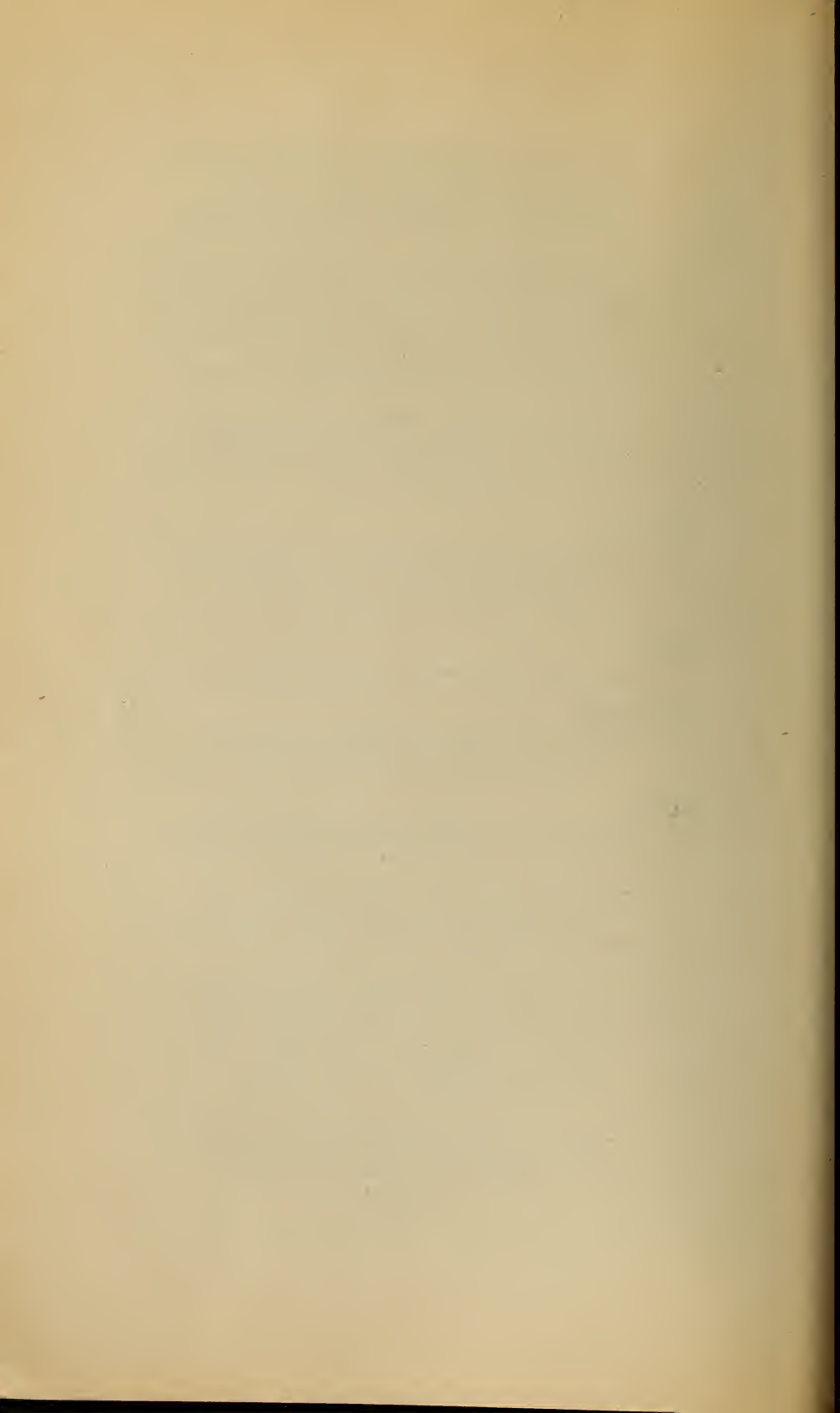
What you receive for them shall half be yours
My wish is mostly but to see them staged.

We authors are like other parents,—none
Are competent to clearly judge the worth
Of our own untried fledglings of the brain.

All Rome derided Cicero's lame rhymes—
It may be that mine will be failures too,
And so I wish to make use of your name
To test the popular esteem of these
My vagrant efforts in a novel field.

My real fame stands on more solid grounds
Since I will be remembered for all time
As the Columbus of inductive thought.

(Exeunt)



ACT III.

SCENE I. The Palace of Queen Elizabeth, some years after Act II.

(Enter the Queen, Sir Francis Walsingham and Lord Burley)

The Queen:

The bench is vacant in the Chancery Court.
Some years ago, when Bacon was a child,
We thought of him most highly as endowed
With clearer mind than his great father had.

Some lords who have large claims upon our grace
Have prayed that this high office go to him.
Both Throckmorton and Buckhurst think him fit.
What say you of him, Francis Walsingham?

Walsingham:

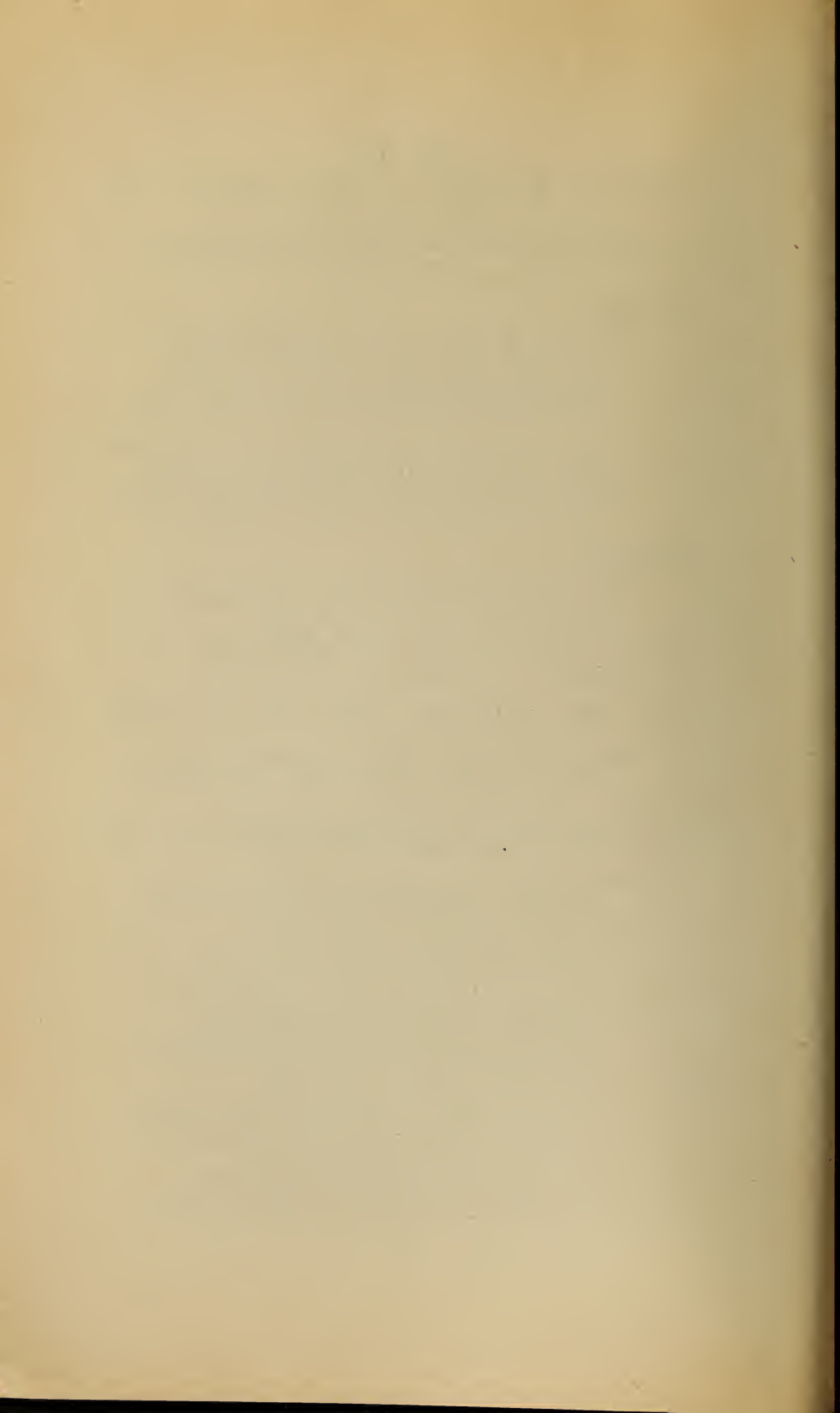
My Sovereign Lady, by your gracious leave,
I gave my views of him some days ago.
As I said then, allow me to repeat,
I think that Bacon is the greatest man
Who ever saw light in this wide domain.

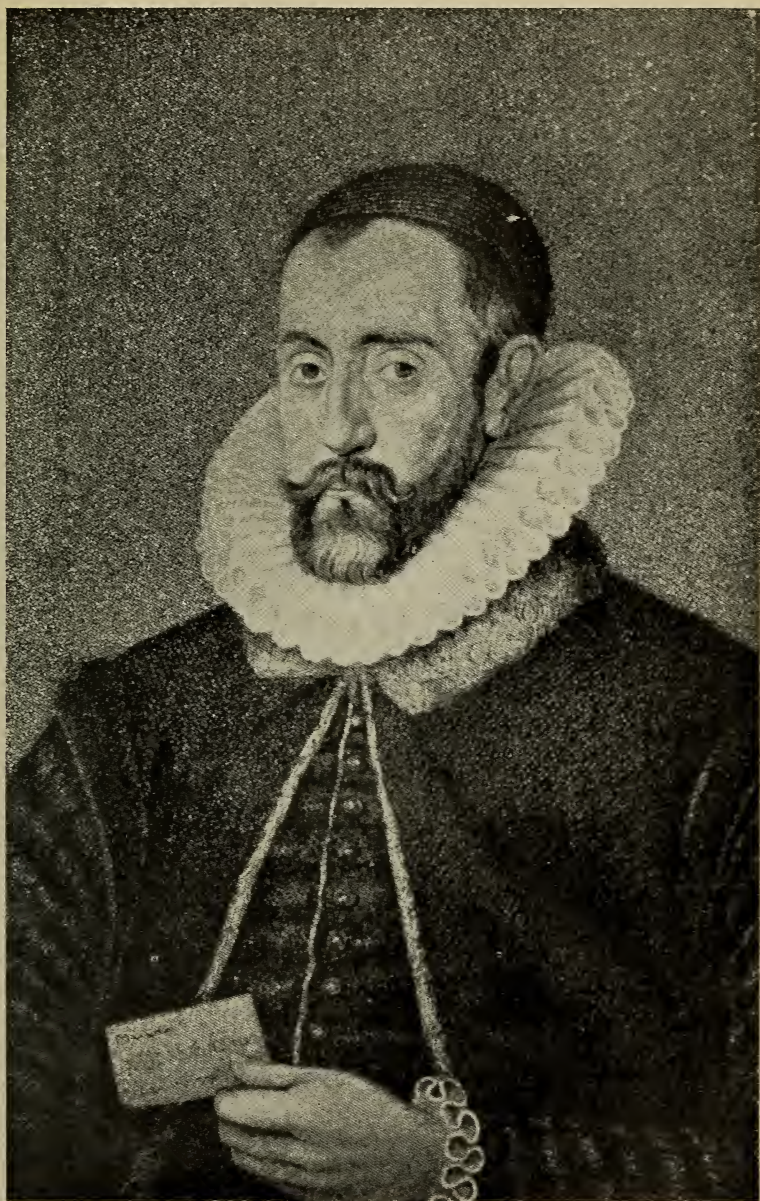
The greatest man should serve the greatest
queen:

His accurate mind will more adorn the bench
Than any other, you, my Liege, could name.

His elevation would delight the mass,
For all good men who know him love him well.

I heard the Ambassador from France once say
He thinks we were evolved from lower life
By natural selection, and that God
Did not create the sons of Adam's race,
And that the monkey is connecting link
Between the protoplasmic germ and man.
He stated, too, that Plato's writings cite
Some extracts from an old Phoenician sage
(Whose name was Sanchoniathan, I think)
Of similar import. I said to him
(But saved offense by courteous tone of jest):
"It may be that the French go back to apes—
For they are odd, mercurial and vain,
But nothing save the direct hand of God
Could build a marvel great as Bacon's mind."





SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM
(After Original Portrait in possession of the present
Walsingham Family)



Burley (to Walsingham):

How is it that this paragon of yours
Has so few clients he is deep in debt?

Walsingham (to Burley):

How is it that a lion soon will starve
In places where a sly cat will grow fat?

The Queen:

And do you two dare interchange your quips
Within the very presence of your Queen?
We have a mind to let you brawlers cool
Your heat in dungeon cells in London Tower!

Do you forget that in this Council Hall
No one may speak except he have our leave?
Lord Burley, we will now allow you speech.

Burley:

My gracious lady, I have this to say,
With your permission: I know Bacon well—
As has been said, he is extremely bright—
In fact he is too able to be safe.

He is a mental juggler, and his skill
Can so distort the truth and gild the false
He always leads his listeners astray.

The Queen:

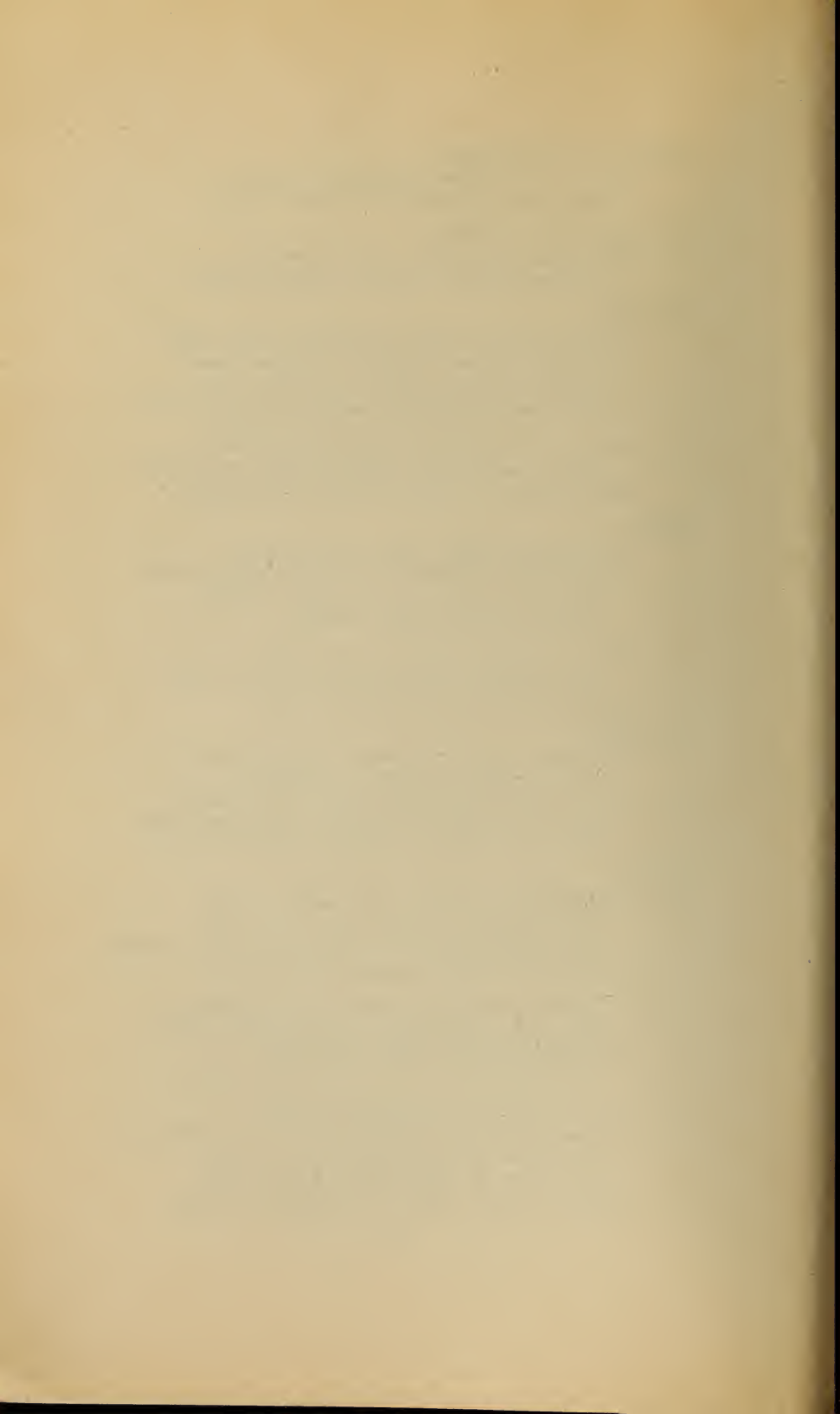
My lord, your words reveal unworthy spite.
Do you insult our sense by telling us
That a Lord Chancellor may be too shrewd?
As well might one declare a ship too swift,
A horse too strong, or falcon hawk too quick.

Burley:

I think him too deep to be safe to trust;
And I think he is too quick to be sound.
Lord Chancellors should have both feet on earth,
And every poet is part in the clouds.

This man pretends aversion for the Muse,
Yet, as is well known, he has written, both
In English and in Latin, every sort
Of composition both of prose and verse.

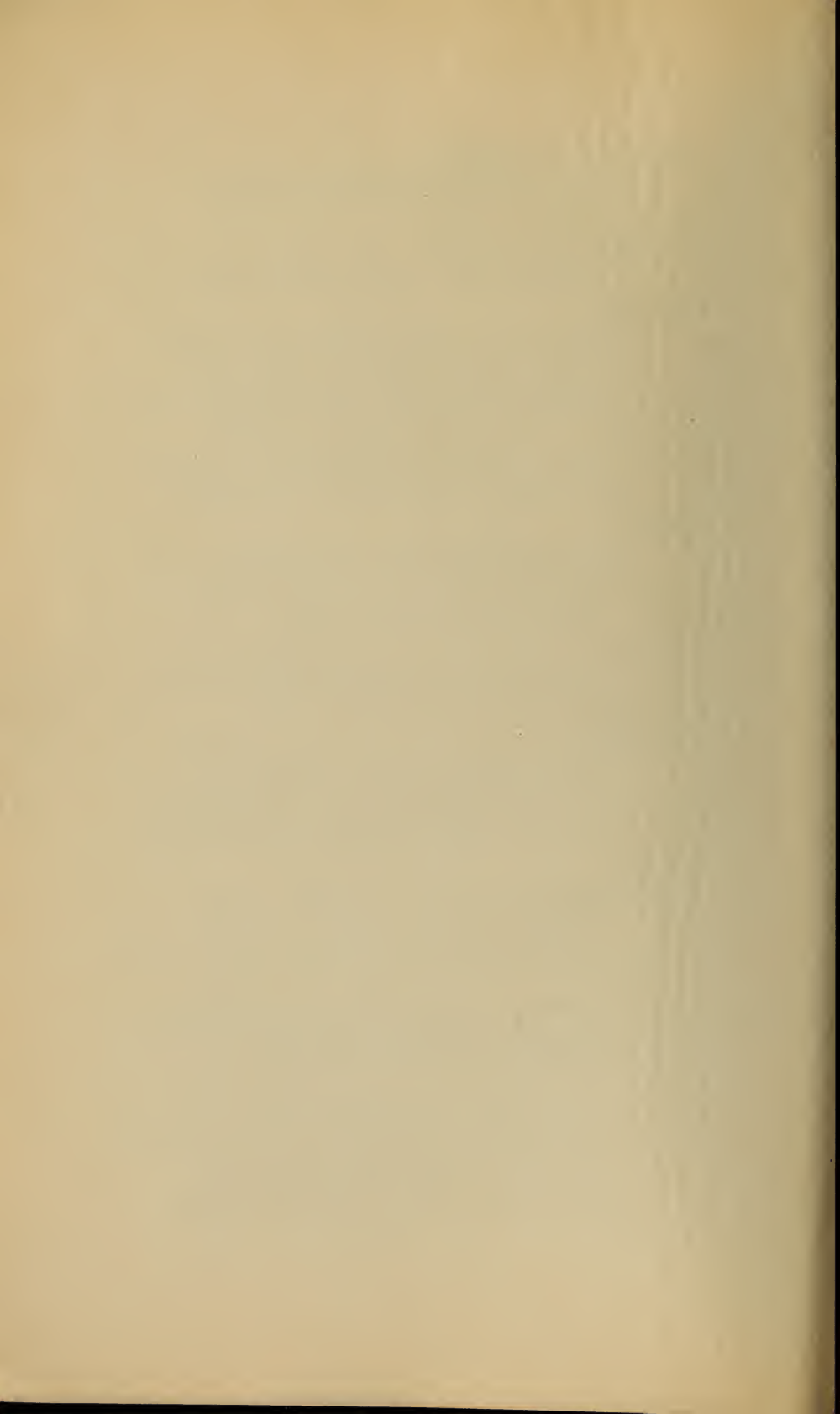
In fact, he has a many-sided mind,
And takes in knowledge as the lungs take air—
Is saturated with all human lore,
And, like the Macedonian king of old,
Sighs for new worlds of learning to subdue.





QUEEN ELIZABETH
[After Original Portrait in Windsor Castle.]

Elizabeth





QUEEN ELIZABETH
(After Original Portrait at Windsor Castle)

Elizabeth



The law is jealous of such varied flights;
He is unfit for high judicial place
Who strives to bring all subjects to his ken;
His intellect grasps at so many things
As to impair his mental grip on each.

The Queen :

You brand him as polygamist, in short,
Because he wedded every Muse at once.
Your talk is childish, Burley. First you call
Him not dependable because so deep
And, in the same breath, say he is unfit
Because he is too shallow. By Saint George,
You are his uncle, but it seems to us,
To quote the words from Hamlet, the new play,
(Acted some days ago before our Court),
That you are "more than kin and less than kind."

Burley :

My royal mistress, I am glad that you
Have quoted Hamlet—for your words suggest
Another ground for censure. I am sure
That Francis Bacon has for years sent out
Unto the world the Globe Theatre plays,
Although they were disguised in Shakespeare's
name.

The Queen :

Had he the time? He is much occupied
And deep in law and in abstruse research.

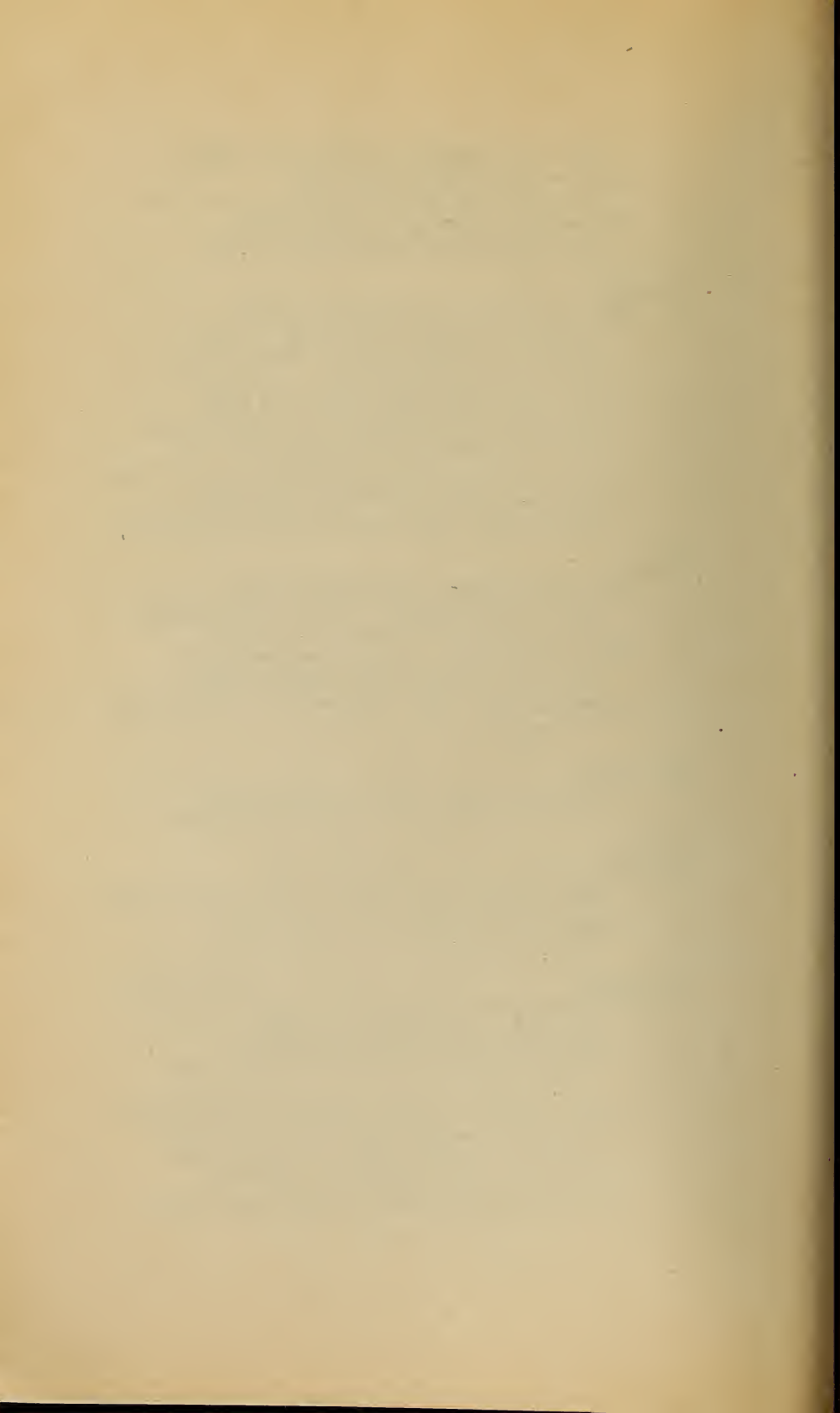
Burley :

Behind that calm, aristocratic face,
His restless brain seethes with volcanic force;
Then, too, his clients are so very few,
He has abundant time for other tasks.

The Queen :

The whole world knows that he is Chrichton-like
In grace and versatility of mind,
But no one ever will believe that he
Writes dramas by the dozen for the stage :

Globe Theatre!—Globe pig-pen you should say!
'Tis but a roofless yard, with a small stage
At one end, and the audience stand in mud,
Or sit in open paddocks on the sides,
Or crowd upon the stage, perched upon stools,



And smoke and drink and fight while players
rant.

Now, by the wounds of God, it cannot be
That Francis Bacon condescends to stoop
To seek applause from such a scurvy mob!

Burley:

Some weeks ago, my wife and Lady Ann
Were talking of his wide extent of lore
And Lady Bacon said he was supreme
In every branch of literary skill:
Her sister said that Francis had declared
Himself unable ever to write verse.

Today my Lady Bacon gave to her,
(To show likewise his skill in this regard,)
Some fragmentary lines extemporised
While talking to his mother of the Psalms.

Your Majesty well knows that Lady Ann
Is of all women the most erudite
(Your Majesty excepted) in the land—
And she is deeply versed in Holy Writ
And in Italian, Greek and Latin lore.

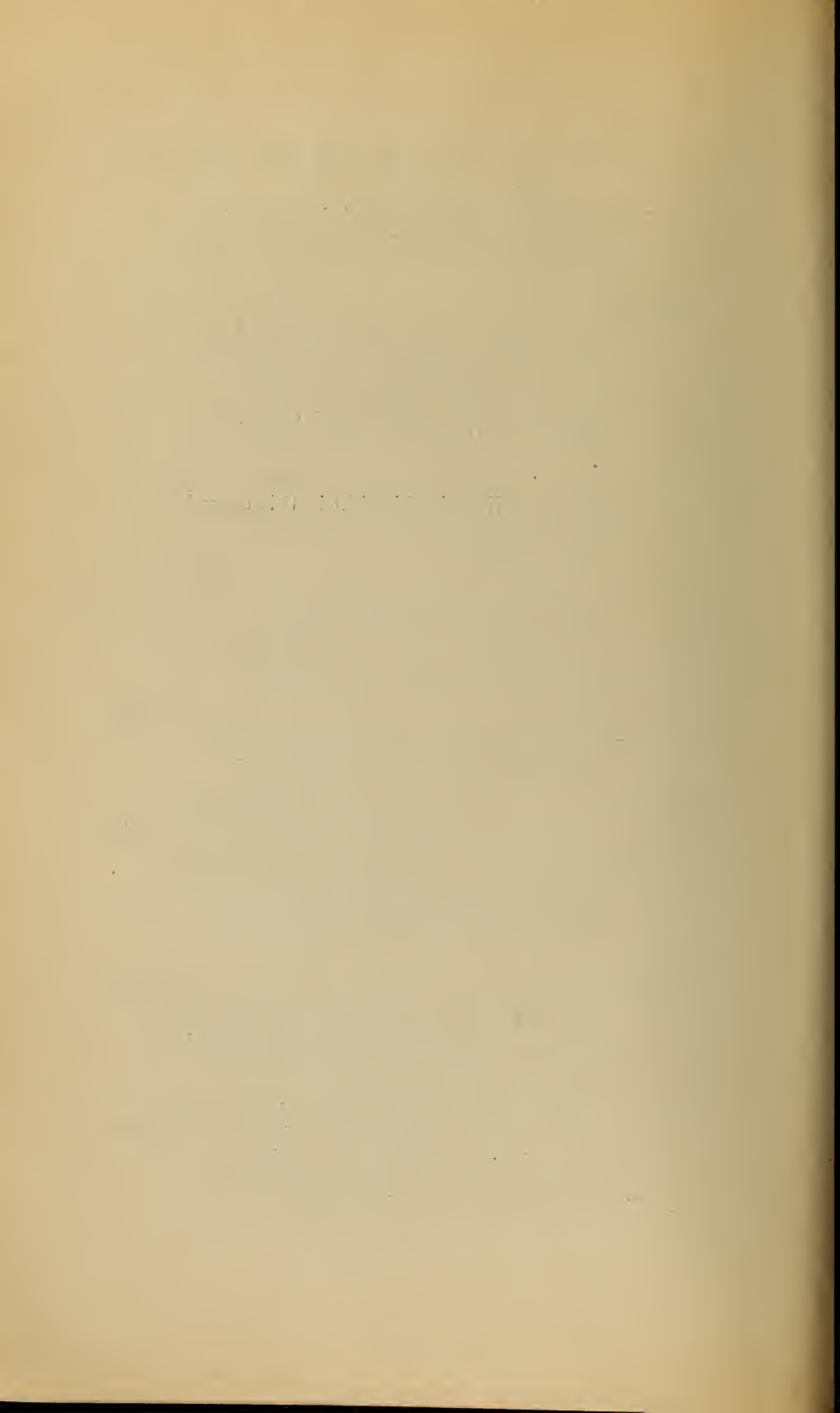
His mother spoke of Psalm the nineteenth, where
King David says the starry heavens sing
Unceasing praises of Almighty God.

They were upon the terrace at York House
At nightfall, and the moon and stars were bright.

While thus they talked, Bacon took up the pen
And wrote the words she brought for us to see.
I have the paper here and, by your leave,
Will read it now to show its easy flow;

Burley: (reads)

“How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold!
There’s not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in its motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim—
Such harmony is in immortal souls



But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Do grossly close it in, we can not hear it."

The Queen :

The lines you read are worthy highest praise
For elevated thought and graceful swing.

'Tis true that Raleigh writes some charming lays
And his friend Spenser frames harmonious verse,
And stout Ben Jonson wields a graphic pen,
And Marlowe is a man of splendid parts;
And Beaumont's style is brilliant as his eyes,
But no such wing-ed arrow of the mind
Came ever from their quivers, it is sure.

Our thanks to you, good Burley, for the hint—
You recommend we should Maecenas be
To this new Horace, whose arising sun
May thus illumine our reign throughout all time?

Burley :

My liege, to me the plays called Shakespeare's
speak

Almost as much of Lady Bacon's self
As they do speak of Francis, for they are
Full of the Scriptures and the varied themes
In which her talk abounds. She taught her son
All these things since he was a little child;

While Shakespeare is a greedy, untrained boor,
Revering neither womanhood nor God,
Who, with plebeian patience, day by day,
Seizes the nimble shilling as it rolls
And loudly cries, as wrestling Jacob cried,
"Bless me, O Angel, ere I let thee go!"

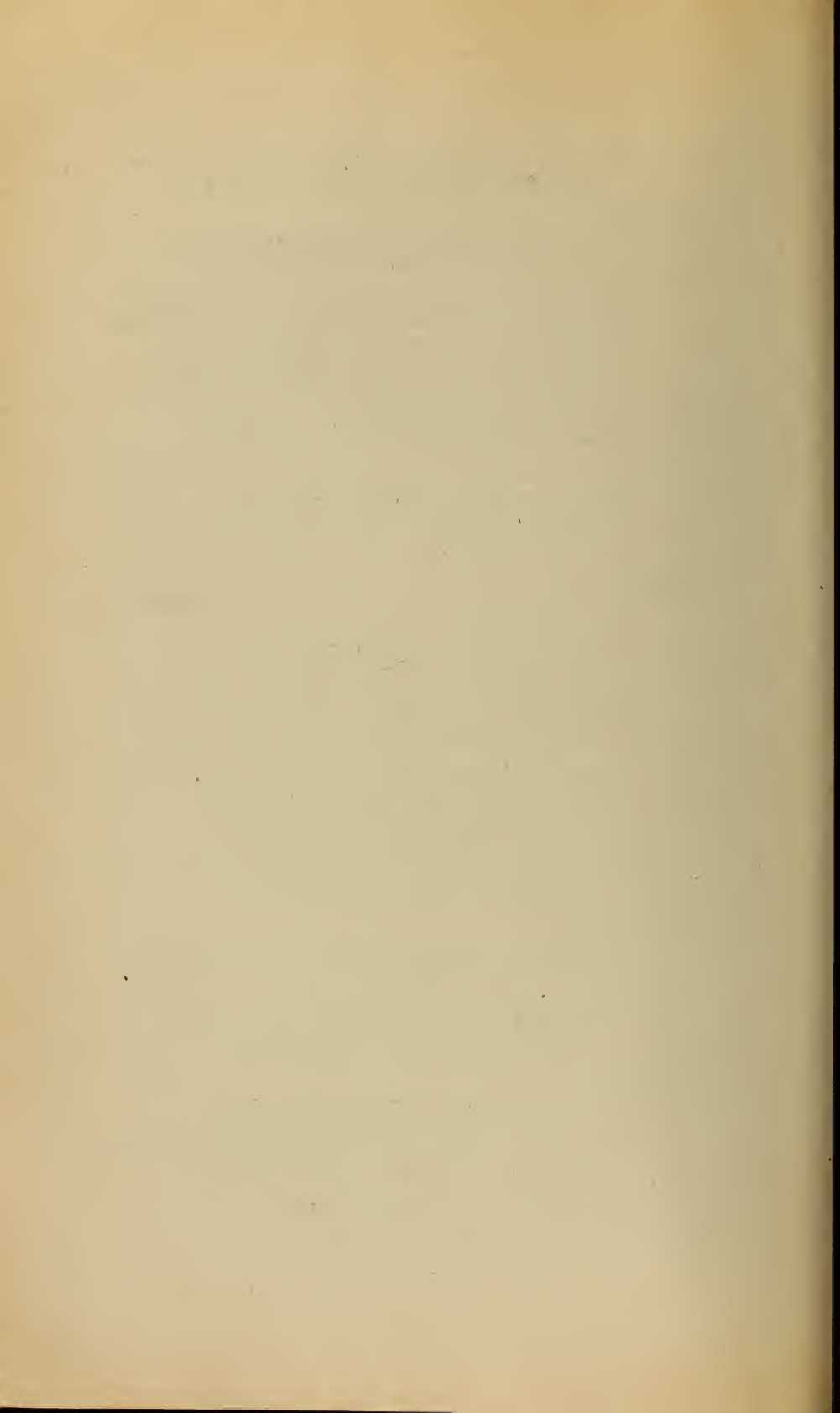
The Queen :

My lords, you may retire—you waste our time—
We weary of this womanish gush of words.

A pest on Bacon and upon his kin,
Including you, Lord Burley, most of all.
(Exeunt Burley and Walsingham.)

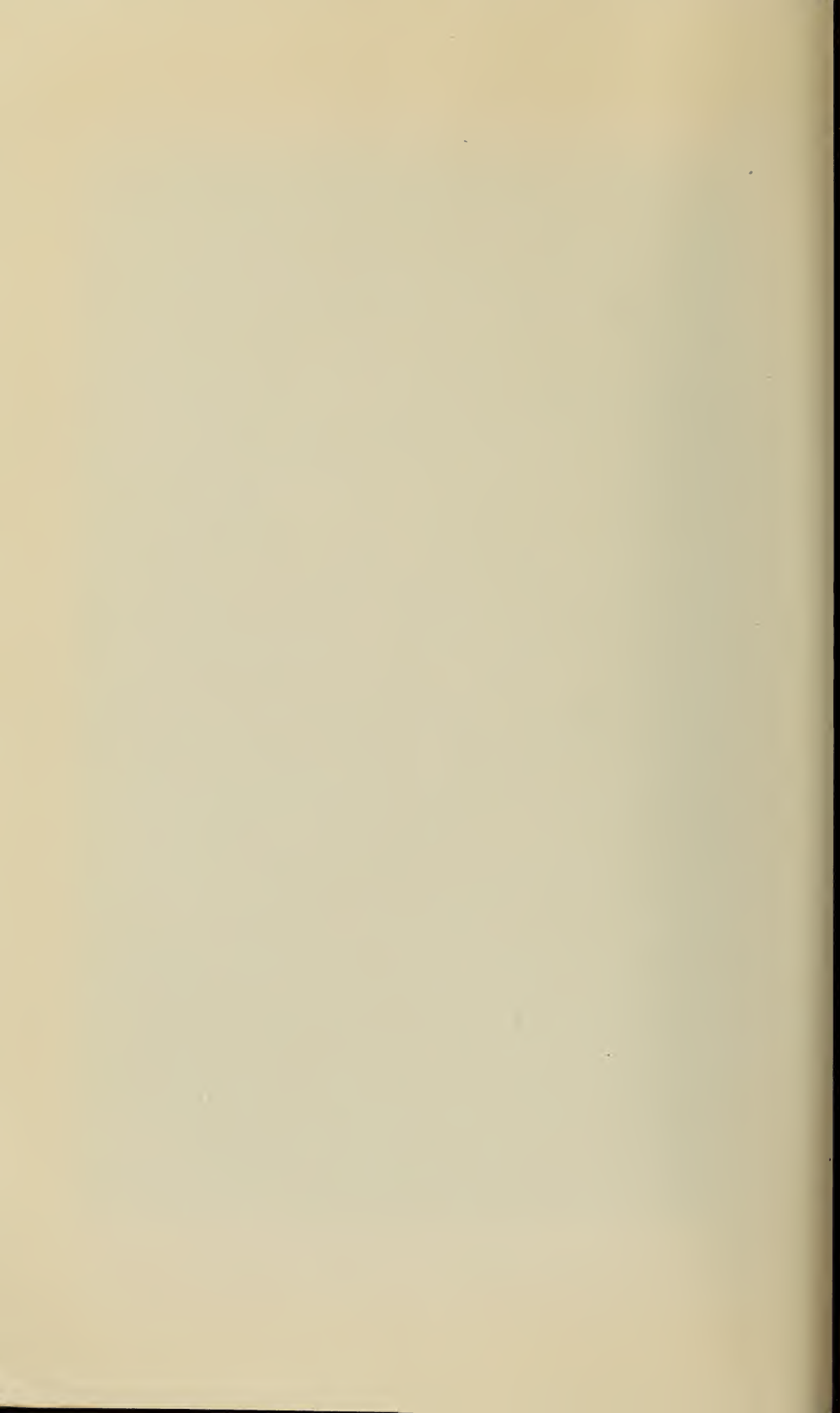
Elizabeth :

Old Burley fears to see this gifted man
Advanced by me to high judicial rank.
No doubt he thinks that humpbacked Robert may
By his more brilliant cousin be outshone—
For jealousy is the malignant meed





FRANCIS BEAUMONT
(After Portrait in National Gallery)



Of praise unwittingly by small men paid
To those they honor with an envious hate.

My only fear about Frank Bacon is
That he may not be easy to control,
Nor show the proper deference for the Crown.

When he was youngest man in Parliament—
In fact, a slender youth of twenty-three—
He was, by force of character and brain,
The foremost member of that noisy mob;
While there he so opposed grants to the Crown,
And was so independent and so bold,
That I have placed a double cross against
Him in my private list of able men
Whose strength I deem a point against themselves,
As making them less subject to my will.

It may be better to give him this place
And bind him to my side with bands of gold;
But if he be a scribbler of stage plays,
Who hides behind a peasant runaway,
As his foe Burley would have me believe,
I fear he has not the well-balanced mind
That I have thought. I will consider this.

Lord Burley may bark wrong sometimes, but he
Has been my faithful watchdog many years.

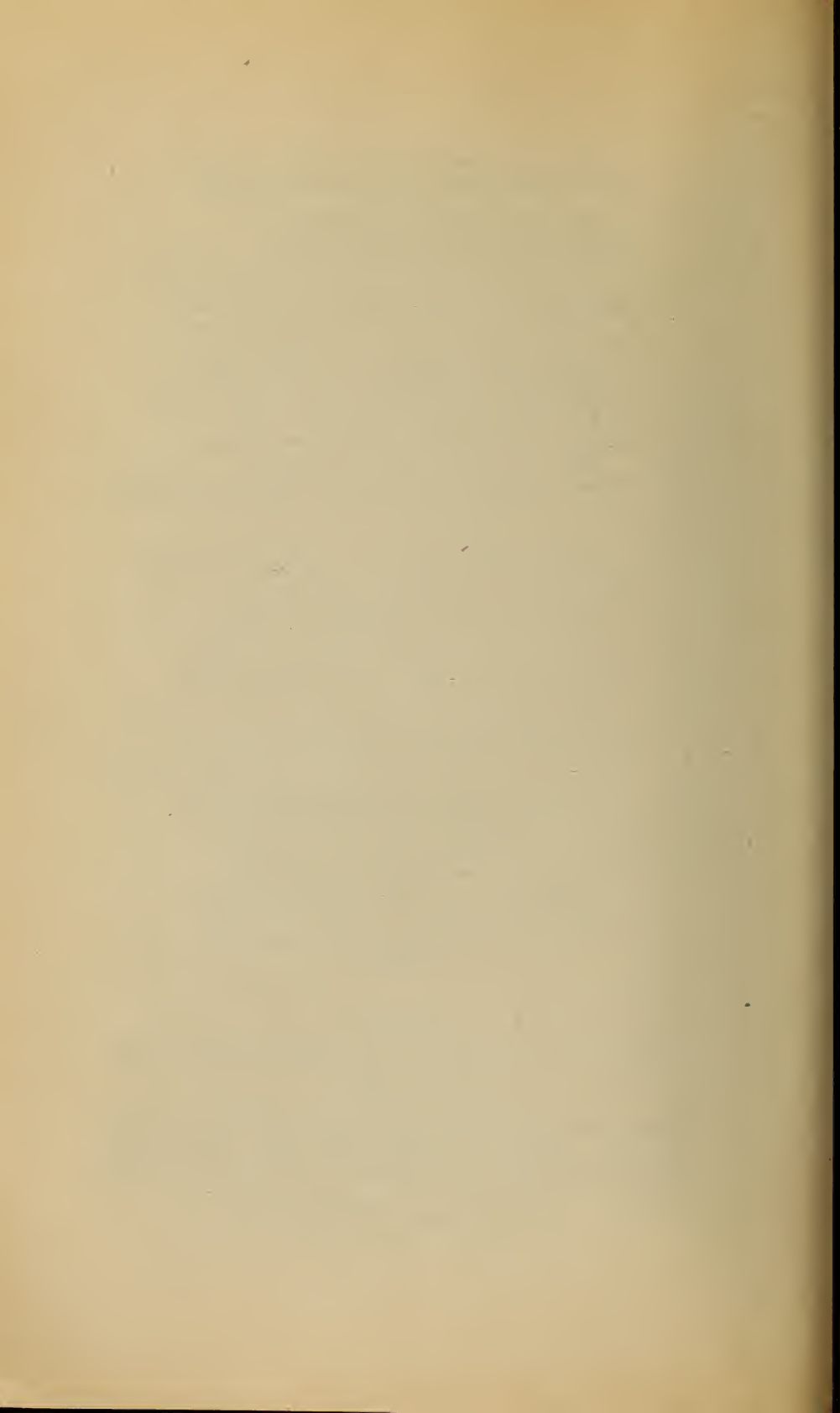
Then, too, the sight or thought of that bright face
Is like the ghost of the dead past to me,
For, in his brilliant eyes and mobile lips,
I see perfidious Dudley as in youth;
And should I raise the lad to lofty place
It might revive some long-forgotten talk,
And force me to send my son to the block
To prove to Europe he is not my son.
(Exit.)

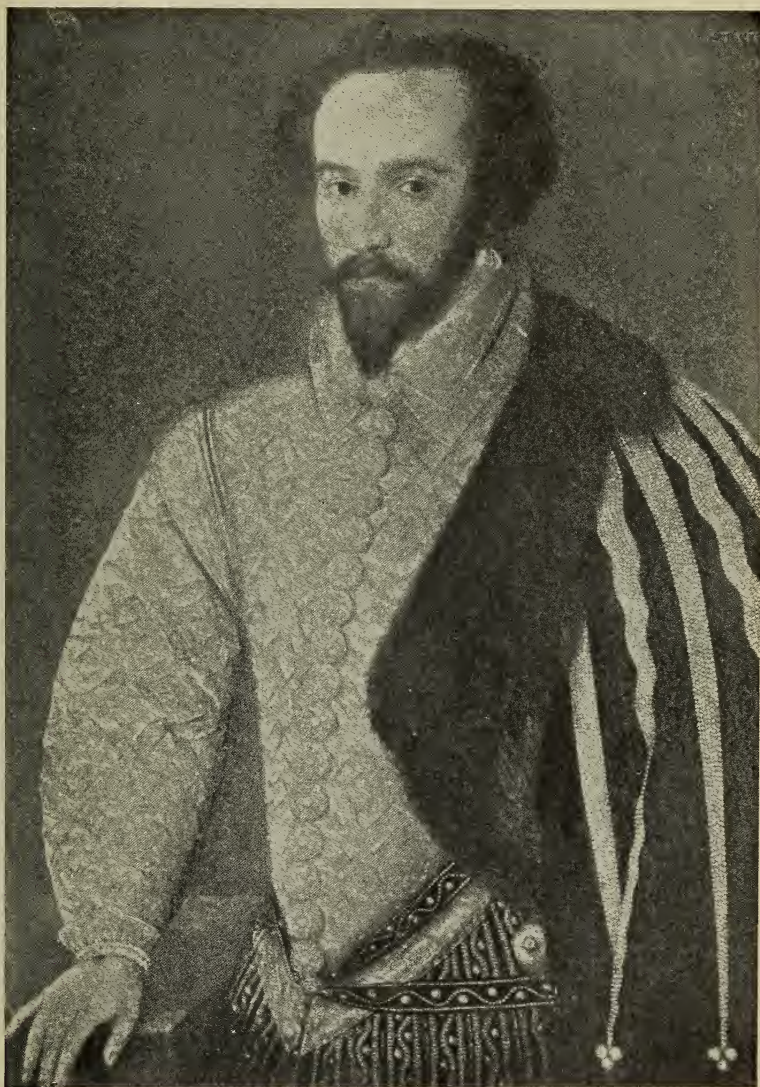
ACT III.

SCENE II. In the Banquet Hall at Essex House, London,
A. D. 1601.

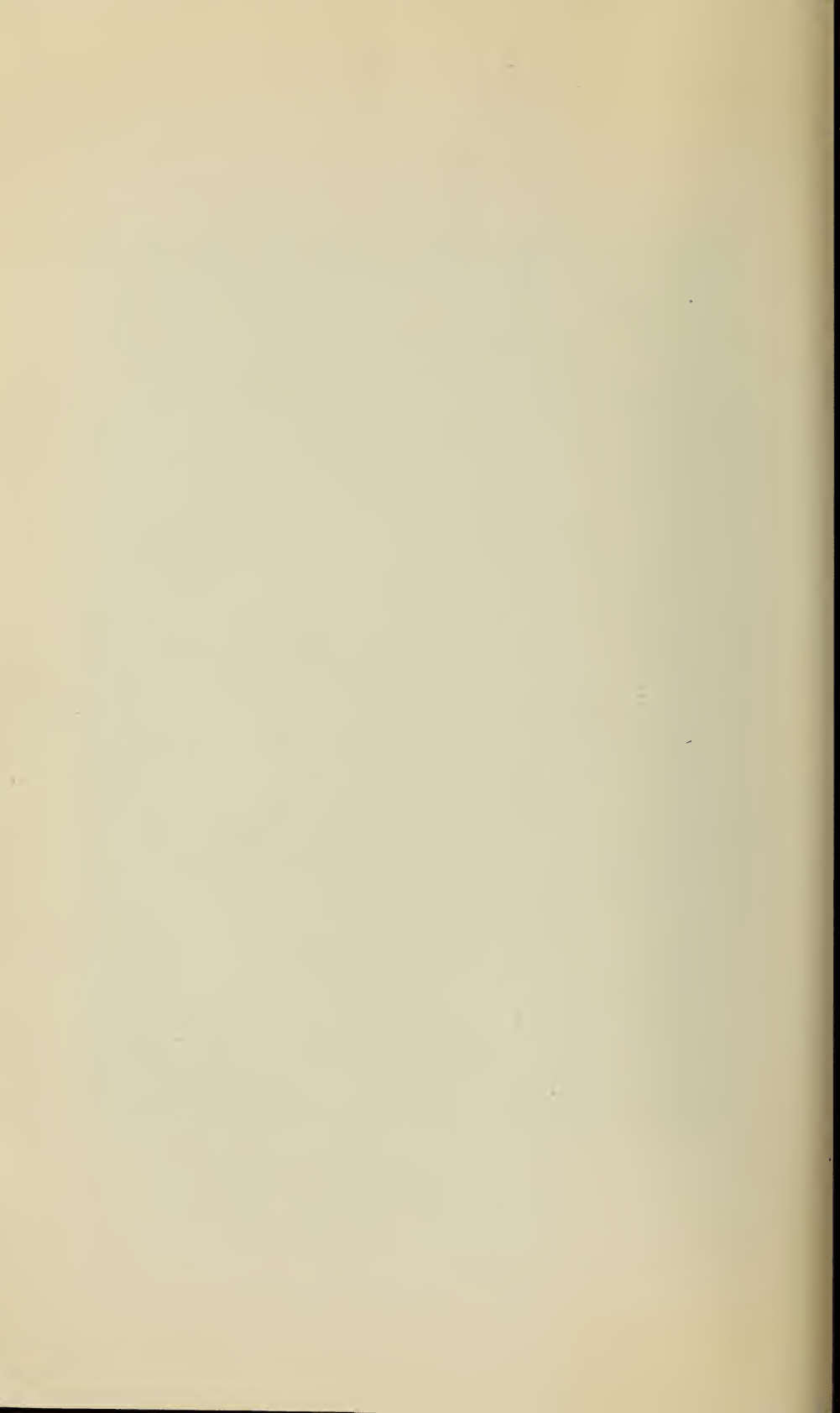
Essex and his guests Rutland, Monteagle, Danvers, Davis,
Costello, O'Neill, Meyrick, Saxondale, Deaconsfield,
Blount and many others, talking, shouting and drinking
deeply.

(To them, enter Francis Bacon.)





SIR WALTER RALEIGH
(After Original Portrait Attributed to Zuccaro.)



Bacon :

My lord, I have just heard the startling news
That you intend to make a wild attempt
To storm the Palace and to seize the Queen.
I beg that you will brand the tale as false!

Essex :

Wise Frank, this business is beyond your scope
In two ways, for it smacks of wine and blood.
First, 'twill be blood and wine, then, power and
wine,
And beauty's smile and plaudits from all men.
Now drink again, my friends, to that new page
Of history our swords will write this day—
(All drink, except Bacon.)
Frank is a warrior of more timid sort,
For he sheds but the black blood of the pen.

Bacon :

My lord, you are unjust in every way
To me and to yourself and these mad youths,
Whose boisterous cheers are but their own death
knell.

Your recent illness has impaired your strength
And wine has stormed the weakened citadel.

Essex :

Not so—at last I have become a man.
I tamely took her insults in the past
And slights I had not borne from old King Hal.

Today will give me back my self-respect,
Which I have lost by flattering a wreck
As vile within as she is black without.

Bacon :

Her Majesty has showered you with gifts
And raised you up to lofty heights of rank;
Though she has been estranged from you of late
At heart she holds you dear, as well you know.

Essex :

A pest on such love as she has for me!
She sent me, in command of untrained troops,
To chase and murder ill-used Irish kerns;
And when my chicken-hearted soldiers fled



Before the breechless, scant-armed natives there,
And in my rage I hung one man in ten
And made my worthless officers resign
They spread at home so many false reports,
That, though she ordered me not to return,
I came to London to make my defense
And proved that I was right in all I did.

Bacon:

And, although you had come without her leave,
In fact, in disobedience to her wish,
Her Majesty gave you her hand to kiss
And showed you honor before all her Court.

Essex:

Yes, but the same day, upon second thought,
The toothless tigress threw me into jail;
And when I fell sick of swamp-fever, caught
While chasing Irish in those marshy wilds,
She dared to say I was a lying knave
Not ill, but seeking by a false pretense
To filch a pardon from her for my crimes.

And, worst of all, she charged that I had made
A secret compact with the tribal chiefs
By which O'Neill should be the Irish king
And I should be the King of England here:
(Upon that hint I acted later on).

Drink, drink, my friends, perdition to such love
As that malicious woman has for me.

(All laugh, applaud and drink, except Bacon.)

Bacon:

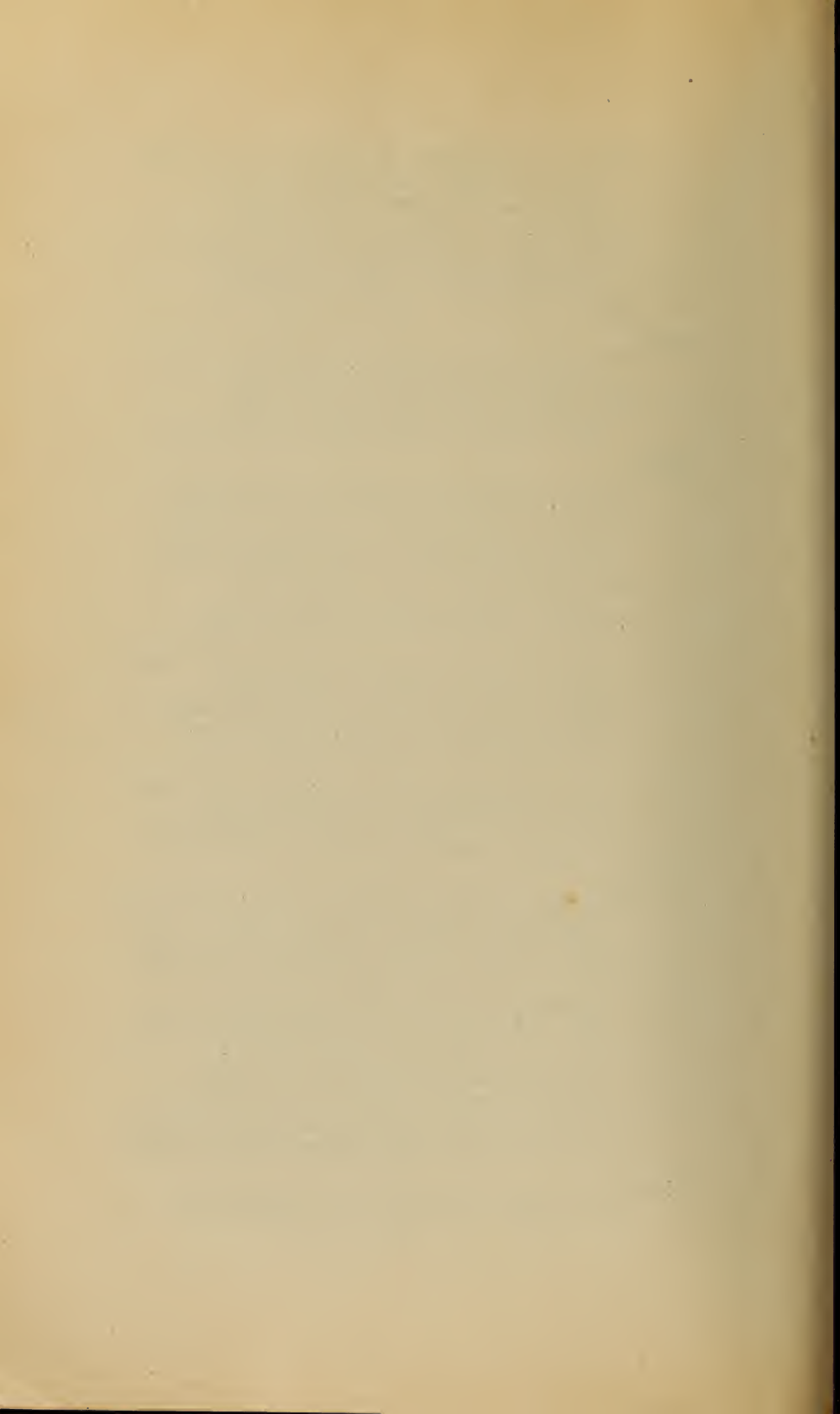
Have you not often called me your best friend?
Now let me prove to you those words are true:
Come with me to Gray's Inn and be my guest
Till you have slept away the fumes of wine.

'Tis only fitting that your wine is red
For wine and blood are most ill-omened twins.

I pray you, gentlemen, to join with me
In urging that my lord be not so rash.
You have at most about three hundred men
And it were moon-struck madness on your part
If your force were three hundred times as great.

Blount:

King James of Scotland is our rightful lord



And I will stand on that against the world.
We have arranged for access to Whitehall
Where she sits grimly brooding o'er the past.
Thousands will flock to us from every side
And we will put Queen Bess where she belongs.

Monteagle:

If we declare her not his lawful heir
It is just what King Henry did for years;
And all the world knows the divorce was void
By which he set aside the rightful Queen
To make place for his light o' love, poor Ann.

Costello:

There are concealed in secret houses here
Men of tried skill in the red trade of war,
Recruited both from Italy and Spain,
Who now are waiting for our signal cry.
And these will slay the soldiers of the Queen
As soon as we assail her palace gate.

O'Neill:

My countrymen who put your troops to flight
And forced the Earl to treat with them for peace
Are now supporting him in this emprise
And will stand by him to the uttermost.

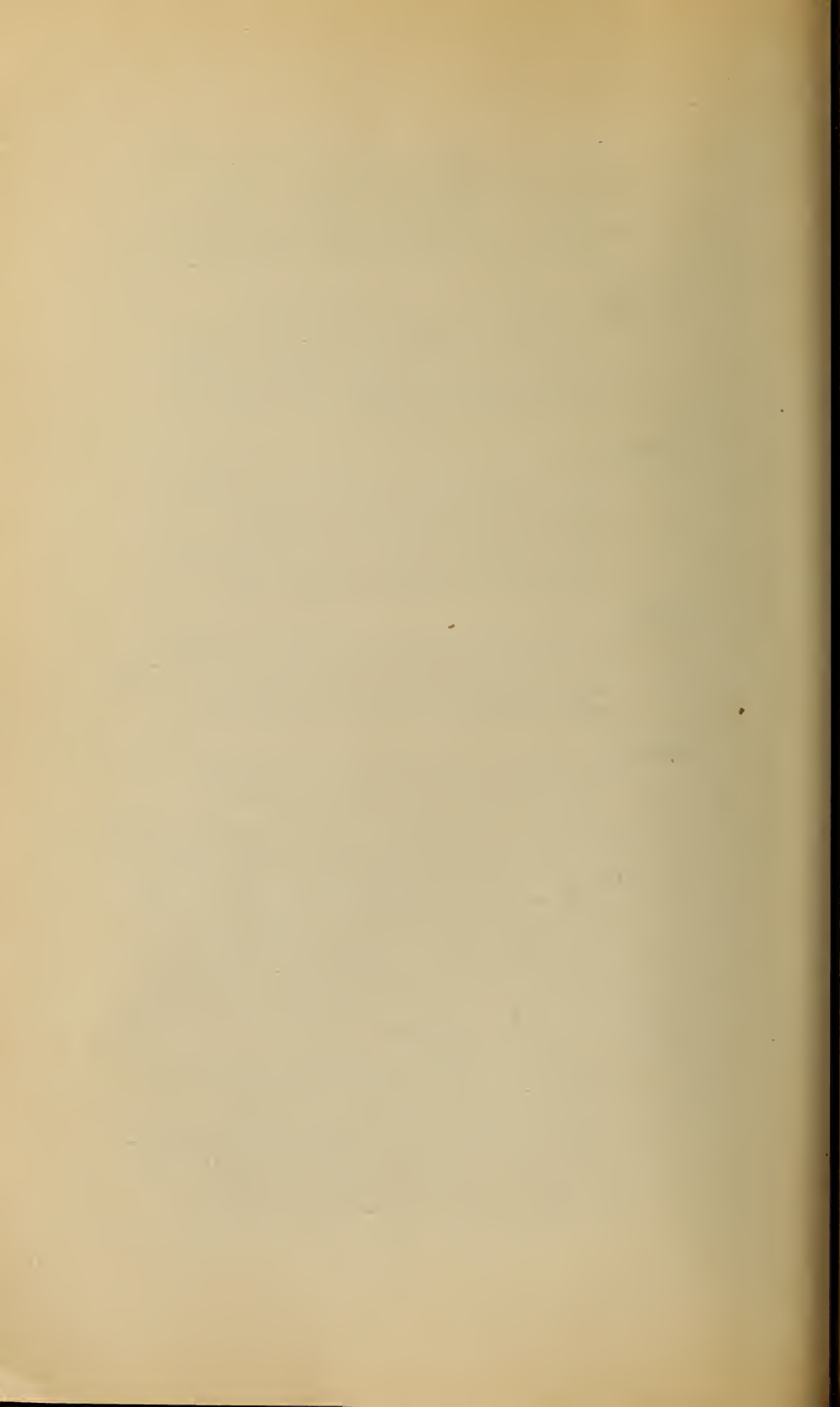
Danvers:

The fact that, in the past, she won renown
Does not prove that Elizabeth is great.

In reigns of queens, the power behind the throne
Is swayed by men they love or whom they trust:
In reigns of kings some pretty woman's whim
Is more controlling than the king's own will;
And, thus, a queen's reign is a reign of men,
And thus a king's reign is a woman's reign:
And so it is that history's brightest page
Tells of the monarchs who wore petticoats.

Lord Deaconsfield, (extending his winecup to a servant
to be re-filled):

I'll—(hie)—stand by his Grace of Essex still
To show my father that I am a man.
I begged the Duke to fit me out a ship
That I might scour the Spanish Main and bring
Great loads of pearls and gold and Indians home.
I said I'd be a second Francis Drake
He swore I'd be no Drake but just a goose.



Bacon:

Dear Robert, this is vanity gone mad!
Was ever lion challenged by a gnat?
The people feel, in fighting for the Queen,
They fight for their own homes and lives and church.

She knows these boyish plans you think so deep
And laughs at them, the while she mourns for you.

Sir James Saxondale:

Now, by my word, the lawyer speaks the truth:
Your Grace will pardon me but we must part.
If I had two heads I might spare you one
But, having only one, need it myself.

I have fought Irish chiefs and Spanish Dons
And red-haired clans from Scotland's hungry hills
And pirate ships a-swarm with swarthy Moors,
But none of them have ever made me quake
Like that same headsman of our ruthless Queen.

Meyrick:

My lord, I beg that you will heed Sir James.
The mob love you but still more love their necks.
They all admire you but they will turn pale
When you call on them to attack the Queen.

The army is a despot's sword and shield:
The troops who fought beneath her lion look
When haughty Spain was smitten hip and thigh,
Will rally to her when your outbreak comes
And you will mount the block and not the throne.

Essex (to Bacon):

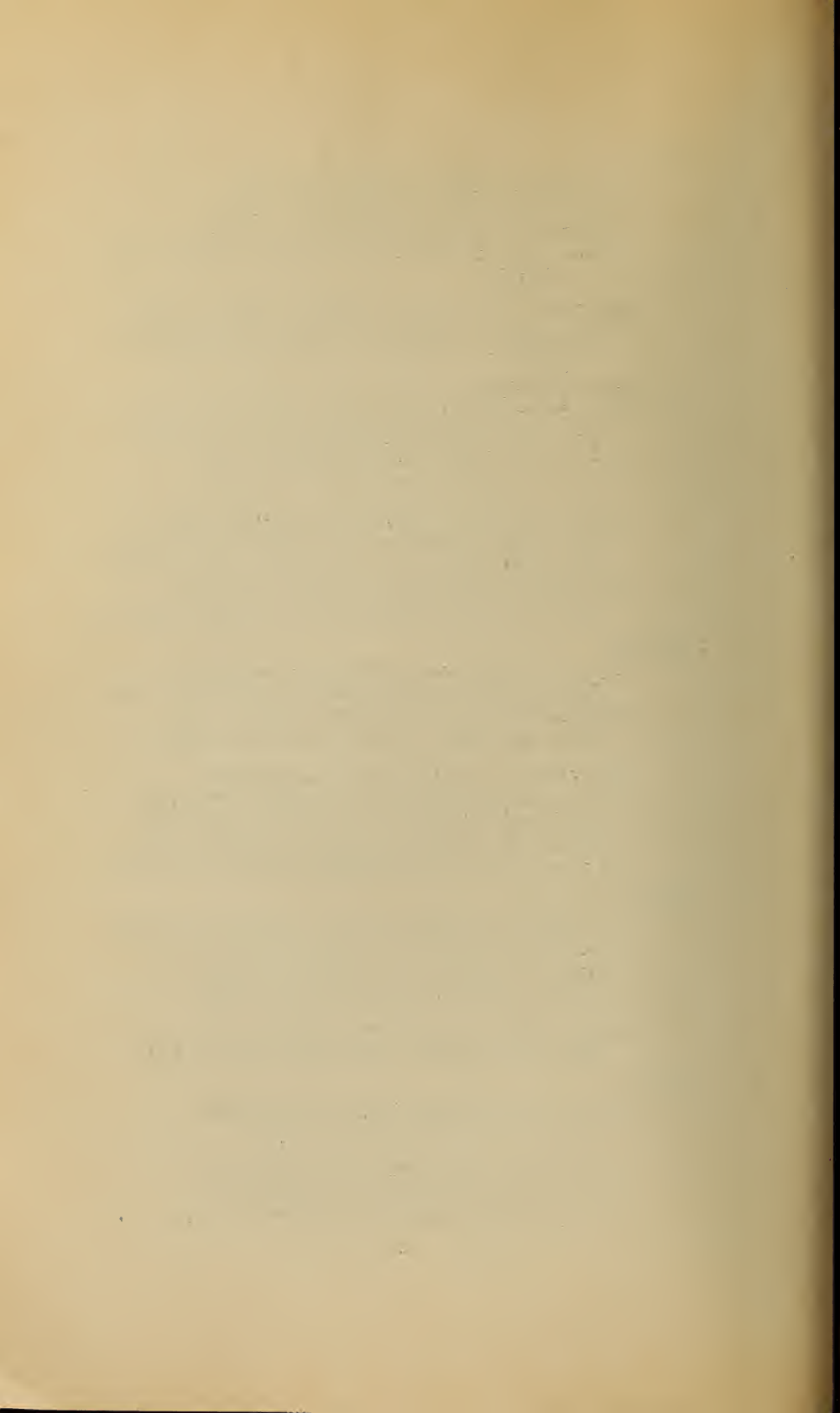
So, Frank, you have come here with lawyer tongue
To scare my friends away in this the hour
When all my plans, so carefully devised,
Are just about to bear successful fruit!

Is it in such coin that you would repay
The love and gifts I have bestowed on you?

Bacon:

'Twere over-payment if my words availed
To stop this folly ere it be too late.

I were both traitor and no way your friend
If I did not warn every hot-head here
That you are walking to the block this day



As straight as drunken steps can carry men.

Essex :

What you have said has wiped away the past,
And you must count me as your friend no more.
And I brand him, in presence of all here,
Who does not follow in my train today,
When I make inroad into London town,
As coward slave who dares not look on blood.

Bacon :

In turn, I say to these misguided men
And to you, Earl of Essex, most of all,
That I owe duty to my country's weal
Far stronger than the bond of other ties;
And that, if you draw traitorous sword today
You burn all bridges and make me your foe!
Think, Devereux, of England and your Queen!
At best, it will mean serious civil war
Though your rebellion will most likely fall
Like figtrees casting their untimely fruit.
You yet can win forgiveness from the queen;
A woman's heart can pardon, next to God's.

Essex :

Speak to me no more of that evil witch!
I know a fair girl who will be a queen
Outshining every jewel in the crown.
To catch the timid, I'll cry "For the Queen"
But my own love is she I'll have in mind.

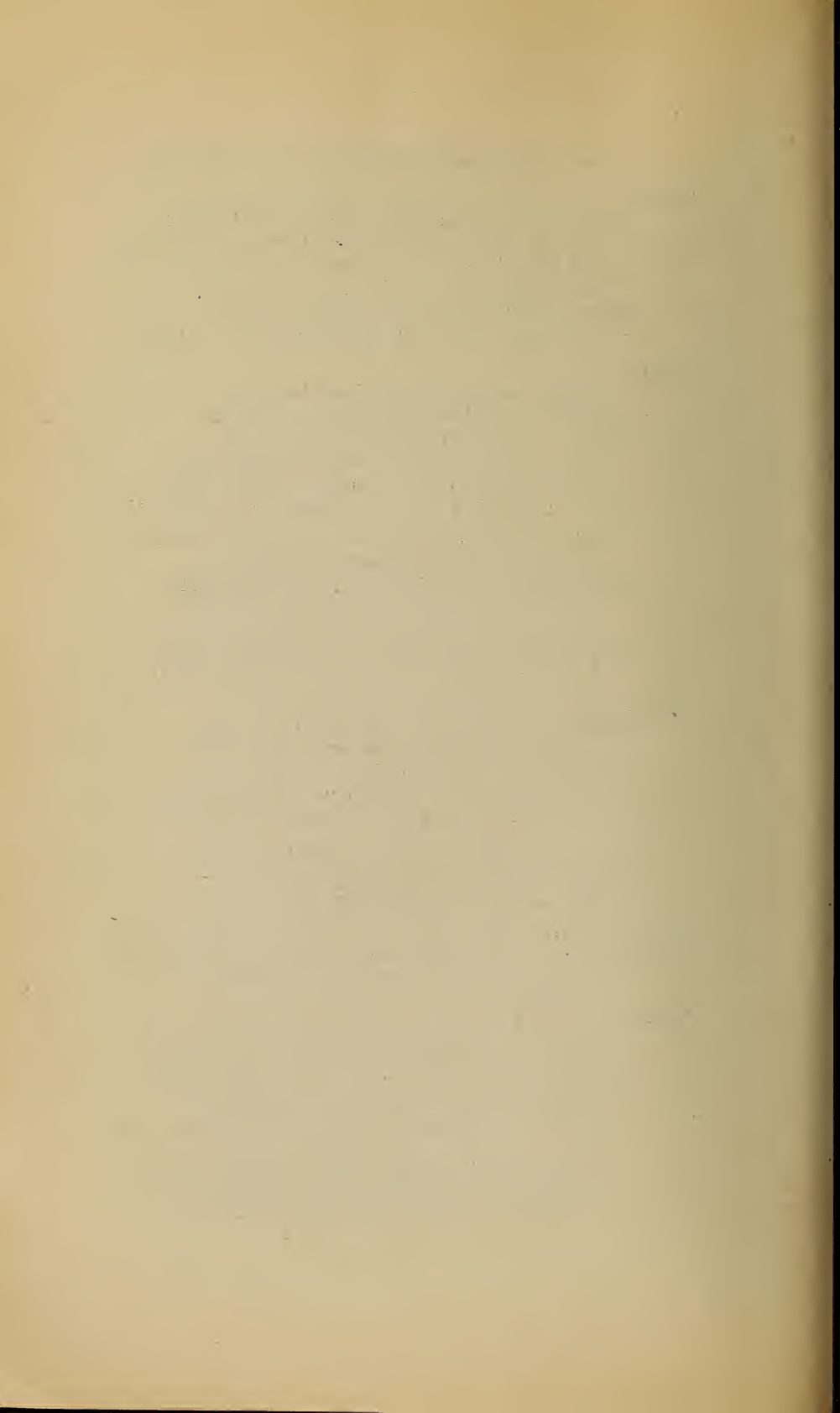
Come on, all friends of Robert Devereux,
Today the path of glory woos our feet—
All London will flock to my side with joy!

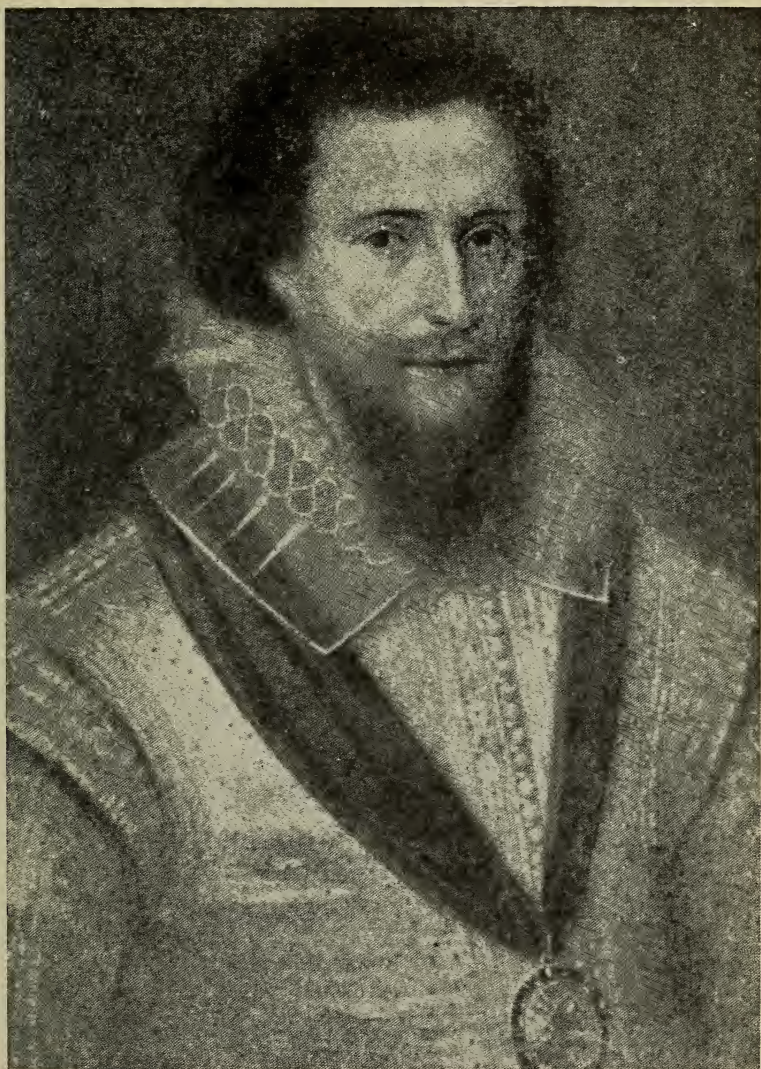
(They rush out with drawn swords, shouting: "Down with tyranny"—"For the queen"—"Essex, Essex," leaving Bacon, Saxondale and Meyrick.)

Bacon :

There goes a gallant gentleman to death!
Today those well-born lads who follow him
Will find, before they sleep, that all the fruit
Of Essex' plans will be that gory fruit
Which will be garnered with the headman's steel.

They think to sleep within the palace walls,
But they will sleep somewhere within the Tower
And then the rest is silence and the grave,





ROBERT DEVEREUX, EARL OF ESSEX
(After Original Portrait in National Gallery)



And weeping mothers mourning for their sons
In many a stately English castle hall.

Meyrick:

My lord of Essex counts much on the mob.

Bacon:

The mob, in former days, shouted applause
At sight of his flushed, handsome, smiling face,
And at rich largess from his lavish hand,
But his defeats in Ireland and his loss
Of the Queen's favor and his empty purse
And foolish cruelty after defeat
In hanging many hundreds of his men
Have weaned away from him the general mass
Although he knows it not. This day he'll lose
All that for years I've helped him to attain.

Saxondale:

Yet for long time he stood next to the Queen
In rank at court and in unbounded wealth.

Bacon:

His proper place was here at the Queen's side,
Where all his polished graces caught her eye
And where his witty sallies charmed her ear.

In vain I begged him not to go abroad
For well I knew his turn is not for war.

Mere courage is not all a leader needs:
If greatest courage were the leader's test
Bulldogs would be commanders of our troops.

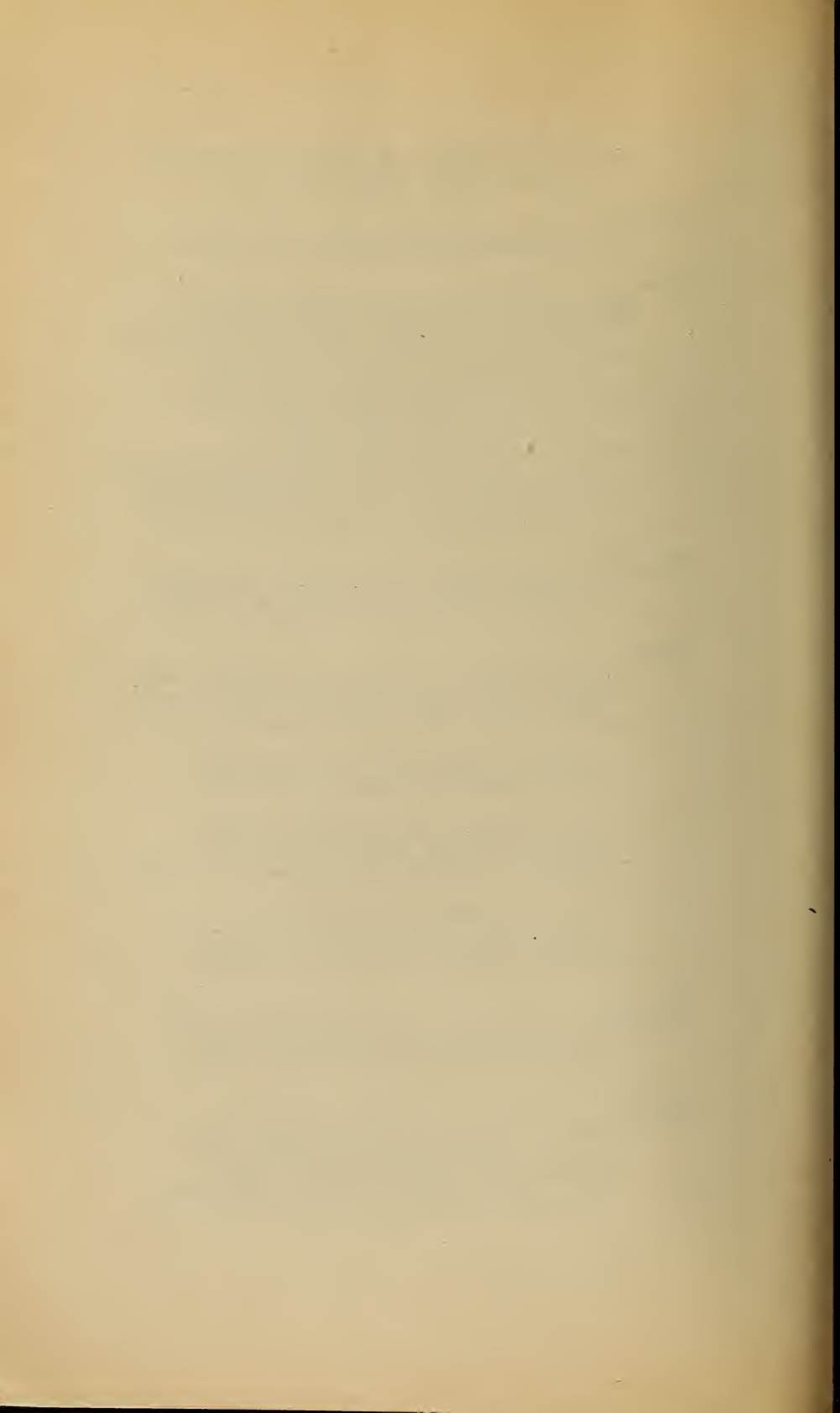
Had he but acted as I urged him, he
Had surely won the Queen's regard again—
But that is past—the Rubicon is crossed.

Meyrick:

Since hearing you, our folly seems so clear
I wonder that the Earl can be so rash.

Bacon:

Each act of man, in varying degree,
Is the condensed expression of his past;
And Devereux, since he was but a lad,
Has been the slave of every fleeting whim.



ACT III.

SCENE III. At Whitehall Palace, London, A. D. 1603.

(Enter Queen Elizabeth and Lady Converse.)

Lady Converse:

Your Majesty, her Grace of Nottingham
Humbly entreats that you will deign to come
To see her, for she sickens unto death,
And says she cannot pass in peace, unless
She makes confession to you of a sin
Which, on her death-bed, weighs upon her soul.

The Queen:

Thinks she that we go at the beck and call
Of any subject, howsoever great?
If she cannot come to us otherwise,
The lazy knaves who loiter in her train
Can bring her on her couch here to Whitehall.
(Exit Lady Converse.)

The Queen:

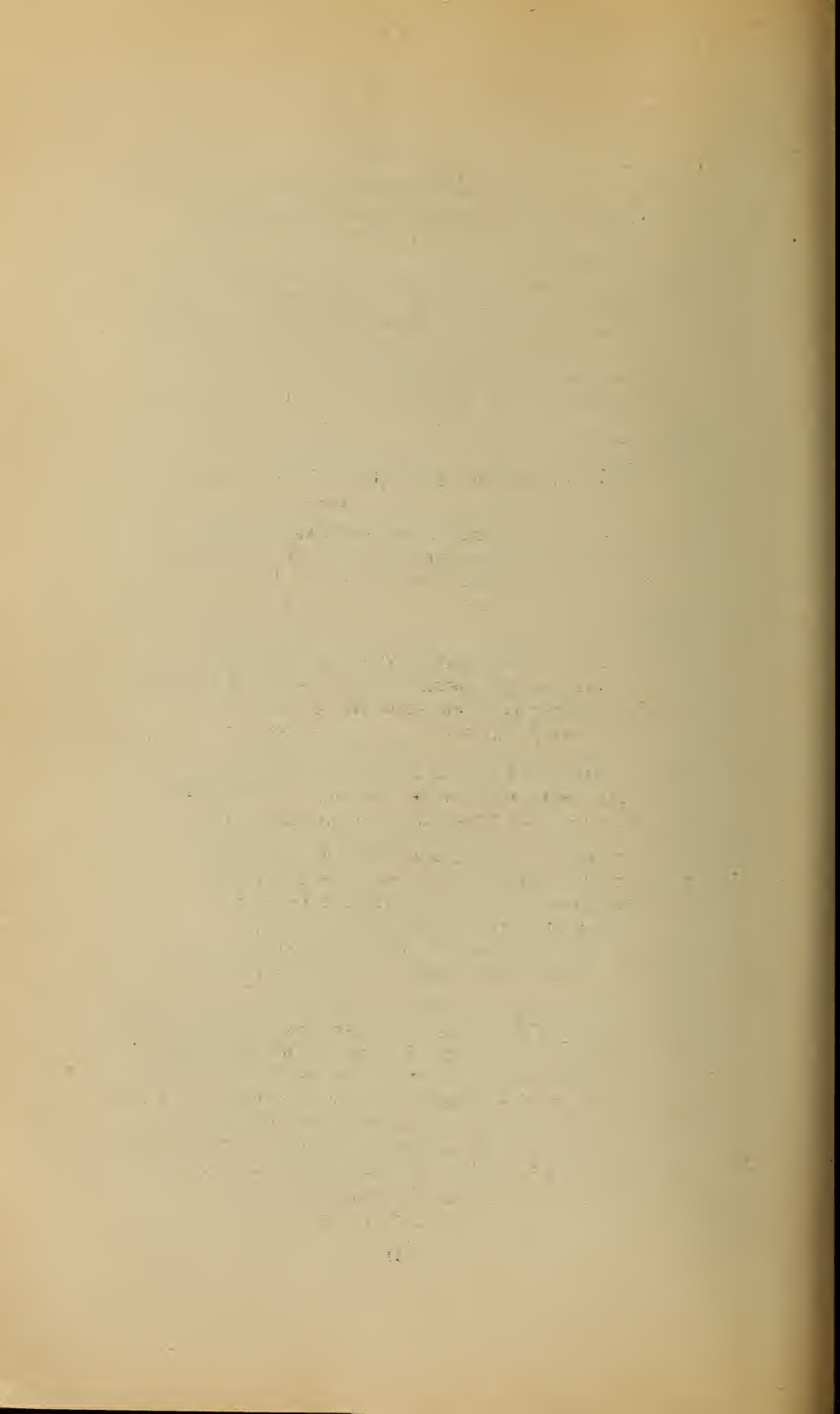
I know not why, but all these recent days,
I have been thinking of poor Devereux.
Two years have gone since he went to the block,
Yet still his presence seems to hover near.

He was so bold, so ardent and so rash,
His very faults made him more dear to me—
We most love those to whom we most forgive.

I would not have allowed the warrant signed
Save to teach him a lesson for his good.
Right well I knew, he had the ring I gave
With promise to him, many years ago,
That, if he ever sinned beyond repair,
He might send to me my signet ring
And I would grant him pardon for it all.

How eagerly I waited for that ring
When he had learned he was condemned to die!
When it came not, so wounded was my pride
That he should treat with scorn the pledge I gave
That I, alas! allowed his head to fall;
And, ever since, it seems to me the axe
That slew him, slew my heart by the same stroke.

(Enter the Countess of Nottingham, on a litter borne
by four footmen.)



The Queen:

Begone, you knaves, and leave your lady here.
(Exeunt footmen.)

The Queen:

And so, sly Catherine has some secrets too
Which weigh so much she must divide the load
By sharing it with one already full
Of cares of state and visions of the past.

• Why do you not tell it to Nottingham,
Or is it something which would spoil his rest?

The Countess:

My liege, the wrong which I must now confess,
Is such as only death could nerve my heart
To speak of, even though two years have passed.

The Queen:

Two years, you say? Why that is just the time
Since Essex—speak, you shrinking minion, speak
And tell me has it aught to do with him!

The Countess:

Alas, it is about poor Devereux.

The Queen:

How—speak out plainly—do not mince your words!

The Countess:

When he learned the death warrant had been signed
And the day set for him to meet the axe,
He feared to send your ring by any man
Lest enemies should keep it from your hands.

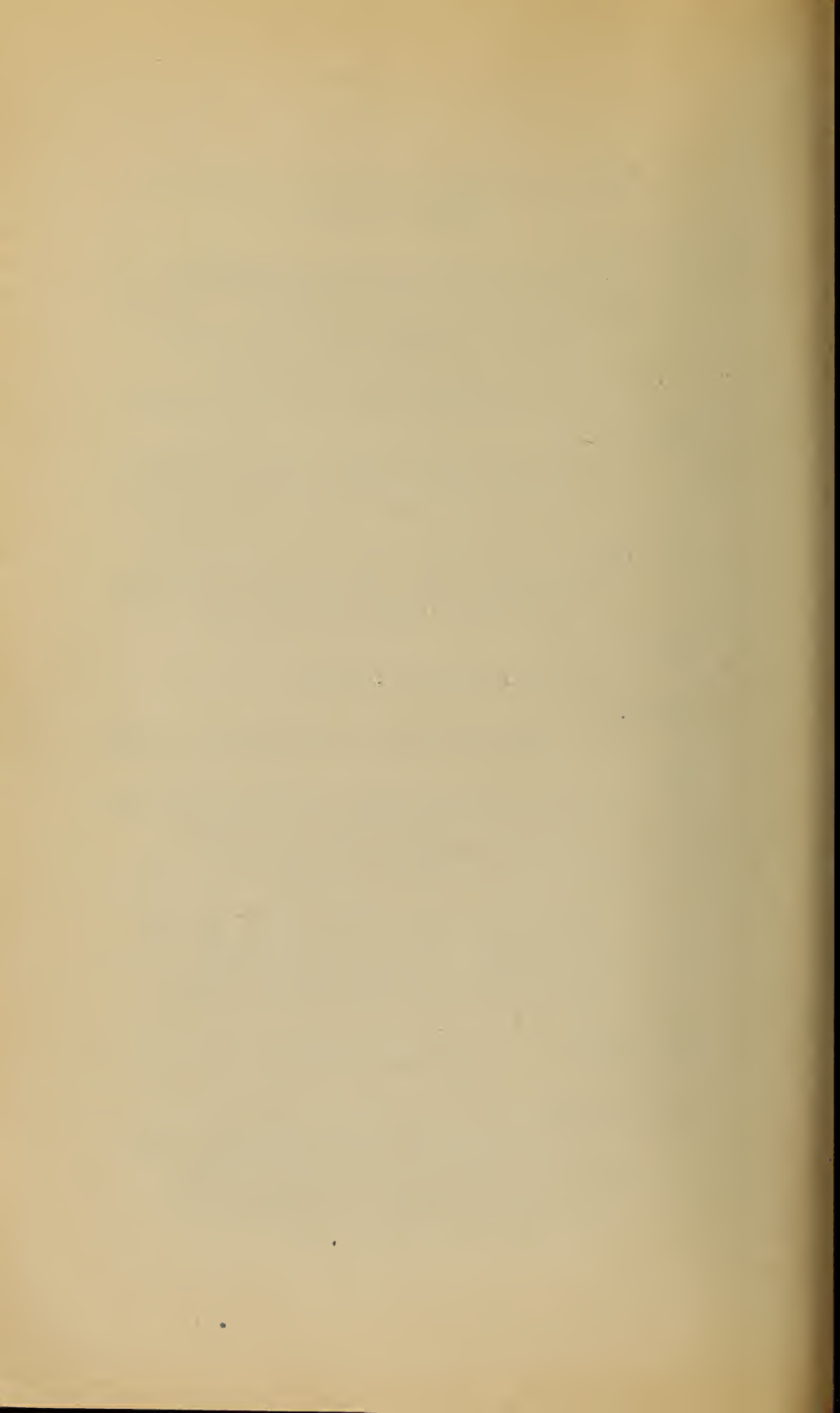
A bright-faced boy passed by his prison cell
And him he called and gave to him the ring
And told him to give it to Lady Scrope
As she was always your attendant here,
And as the boy said he knew her by sight.

The Queen:

Talk not to me of Mary Scrope—go on!

The Countess:

Her Ladyship and I, as you well know,
Are much alike and, thoughtlessly, this child
Gave by mistake the ring into my hands
And me the message it was from the Earl
With supplication that you spare his life.



The Queen:

Why gave you not the ring to me at once?

The Countess:

The Earl of Essex had sworn many times
He would not rest till Nottingham was slain
And so my husband, whom I showed the ring,
Ordered that I should tell of it to none
So that his enemy might go to death.

The Queen:

By God, by Christ, by Mary and the Saints,
I'll have your head and Nottingham's for this!

And, so, that voice, which echoed in my ears,
Strove to frame words to tell me how he watched
Each moment for the coming of the keys
To take the shackles from those shapely limbs!
(Shaking her violently.)

You paltry, puny, white-faced, trembling wretch,
When you have burned a thousand years in hell
Your sufferings will not suffice to pay
For one short pang that pierced my darling's
heart!

(Hysterically.)

Yes, Essex, I can hear your voice tonight,
Yes, I can hear that joyous, ringing laugh,
And I can see your careless, easy grace
As you would bend to kiss your sovereign's
hand—

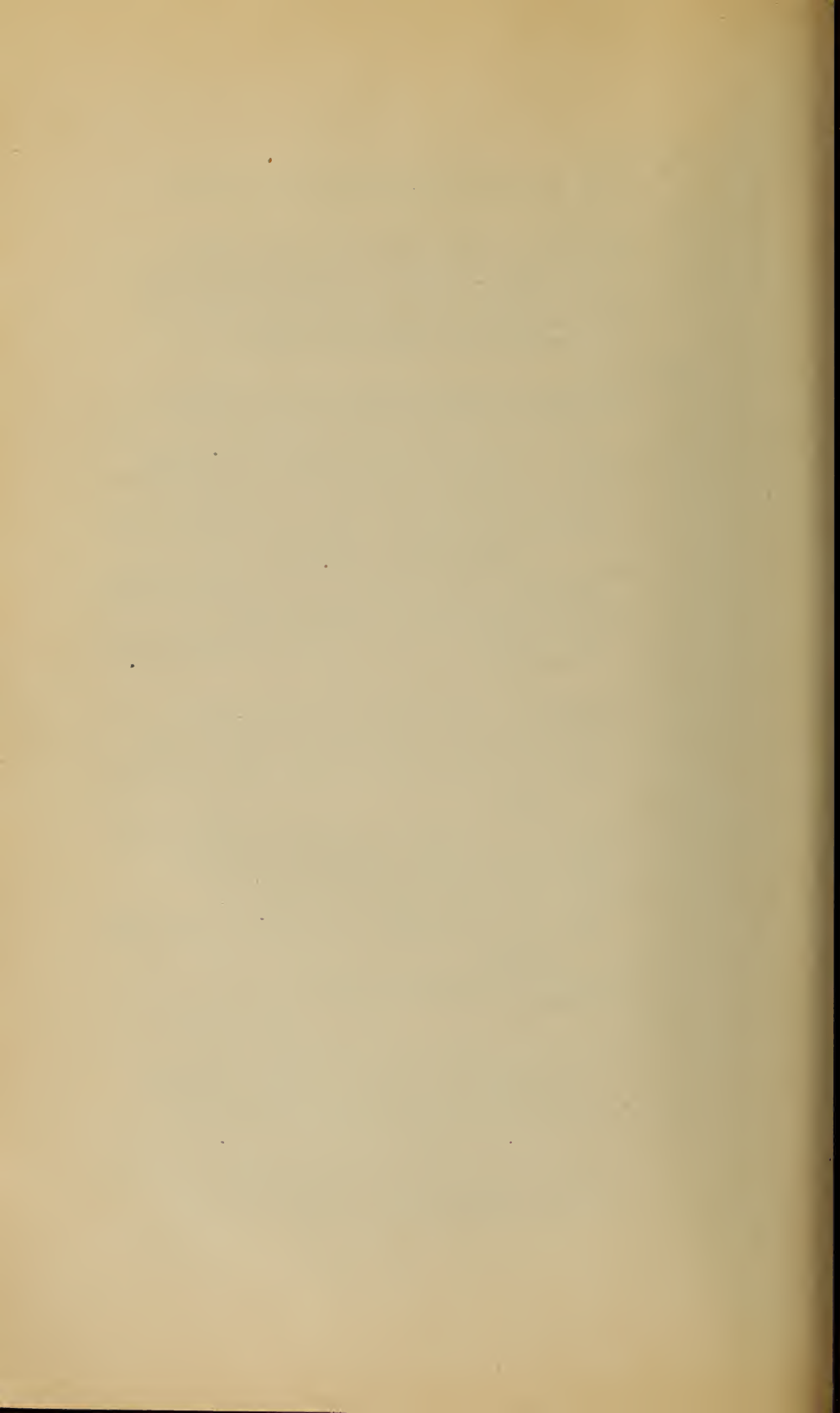
Come here and let me stroke those rumpled curls
That always seem rebellious of control—
I love them, like I love their rebel lord.
Do you remember when you rode by me
The day we drilled the troops on Hounslow
Heath?

Ah, Essex, on that day I looked at you
More often than I looked—

God pity me

I murdered him I loved! Oh, that a fool,
A whimpering, crouching, timid, woman-fool,
Like this base minion praying on yon couch,
Could put the light of my existence out!

My mind is dazed—I cannot shape my thoughts—
When I am stronger I will see that you
And that designing son of hell, your lord,





QUEEN MARY OF SCOTLAND, DRESSED FOR
HER EXECUTION

(After a Portrait in Windsor Castle)



Taste the sharp medicine you gave to him—
God hates a liar and I hate a fool!

Ho there, without—bid Burley come to me!
My head is wrong—my faithful Burley's dead—
And—I—am—old. Surely the wind must blow
From bleak Smithfield tonight,—the air's so full
Of smell of burning human flesh and bones
And to my ears float curses deep and screams.

Hush, Mary Stuart, you need not repine—
Back to your grave! Stop pointing to your
throat!

You could not have lived many years at best—
And the grave is more restful than the throne—
I'll pay you back, for James shall be the King—
I'll treat your son more kindly than my own—
Poor Francis—all my sins have found me out!
(Sinks insensible, to the floor.)

ACT IV.

SCENE I. Bacon's Country Residence. A. D. 1622.

(Enter Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson.)

Bacon:

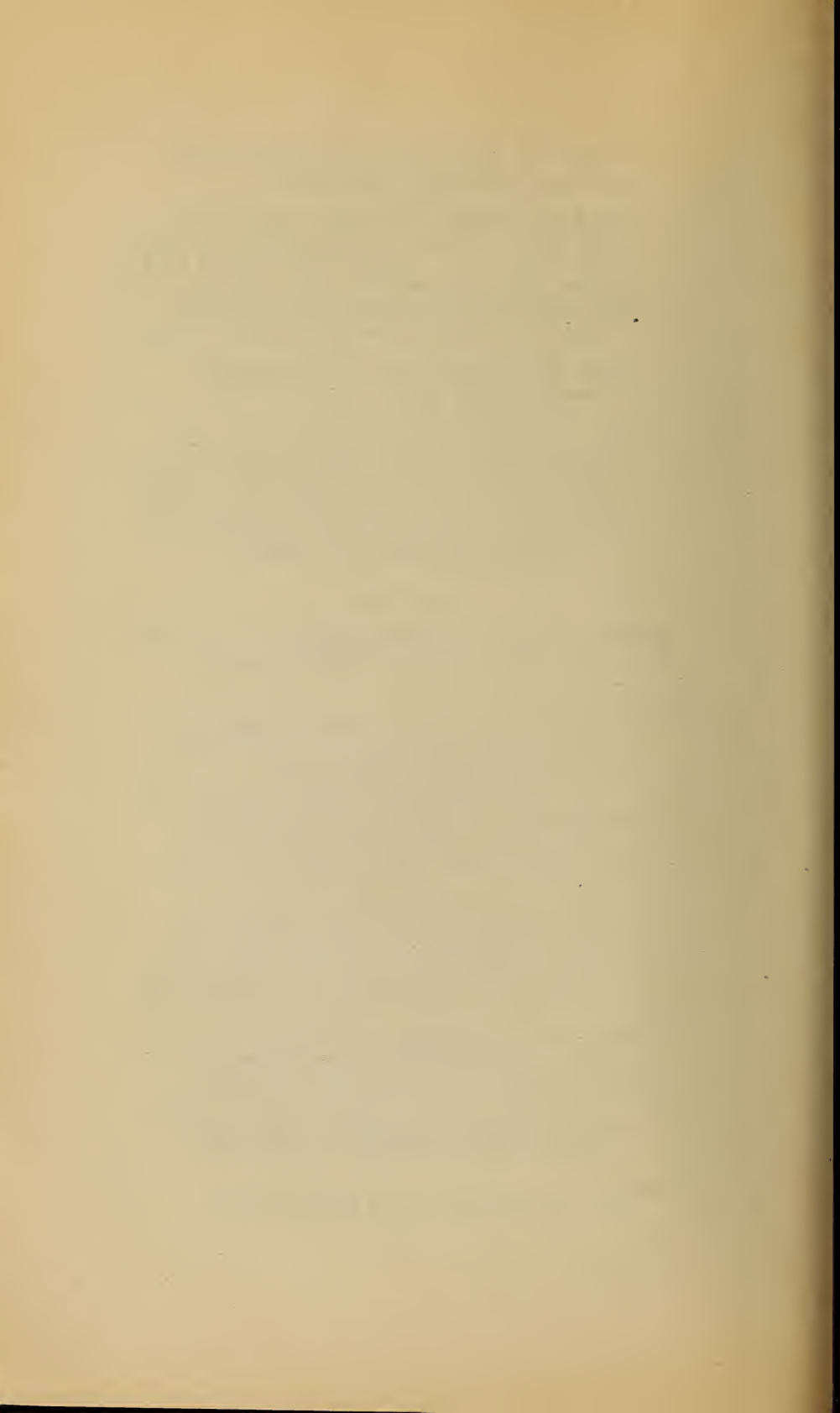
Old friend, we two are bound by potent ties,
For our two selves are, of all now alive,
The foremost among literary men;
And you always have been my trusted scribe
To change to Latin form my English books
When labors of the woolsack did prevent
My doing all the work with mine own hand.

My plays and essays may remain as now
In the crude language of the common herd,
But my more valued children of the brain
Must march adown the path of endless years
Dressed, like great statues, in a classic garb.

Then too, the church tie binds us closer yet;
To you, a bold knight errant of the pen,
To be adherent to the Church of Rome,
If you be prudent, will not cause you harm,
But I have been constrained to act a part,
In that regard repugnant to my wish.

Jonson:

On my conversion to the ancient church,



I took risk of conversion to a roast
At one of the Queen's frequent Smithfield fires;
For she burned Catholics on the same spot
Where her late sister burned the heretics.

But, as I was in jail at that same time,
On charge of murder in the duello,
And as it was my second man, I thought
That I was sure of death in any case.

Goodness is as contagious as disease—
So, through attachment for a gentle priest
I learned to love when we were cell-mates there,
(And whom they burned alive for saying mass—
A martyred servant of his martyred Lord,)
I quit the errors of the English church
For those of Rome. The good priest one day
wrote
With charcoal on the rude wall of our cell:
“That holy Vestal Virgin, the True Church
Has tended art's neglected fires and saved
The going out of civilization's torch
When barbarism rioted in blood
Through every land beneath Christ's pitying
eyes.”

Bacon:

He sleeps serenely, sure of his reward:
I almost envy that devoted priest.

My life has fallen into evil days—
My name is smirched with slanders world-wide
spread—
Poor Samson, blinded, hooted at by foes,
Was never more degraded than am I.

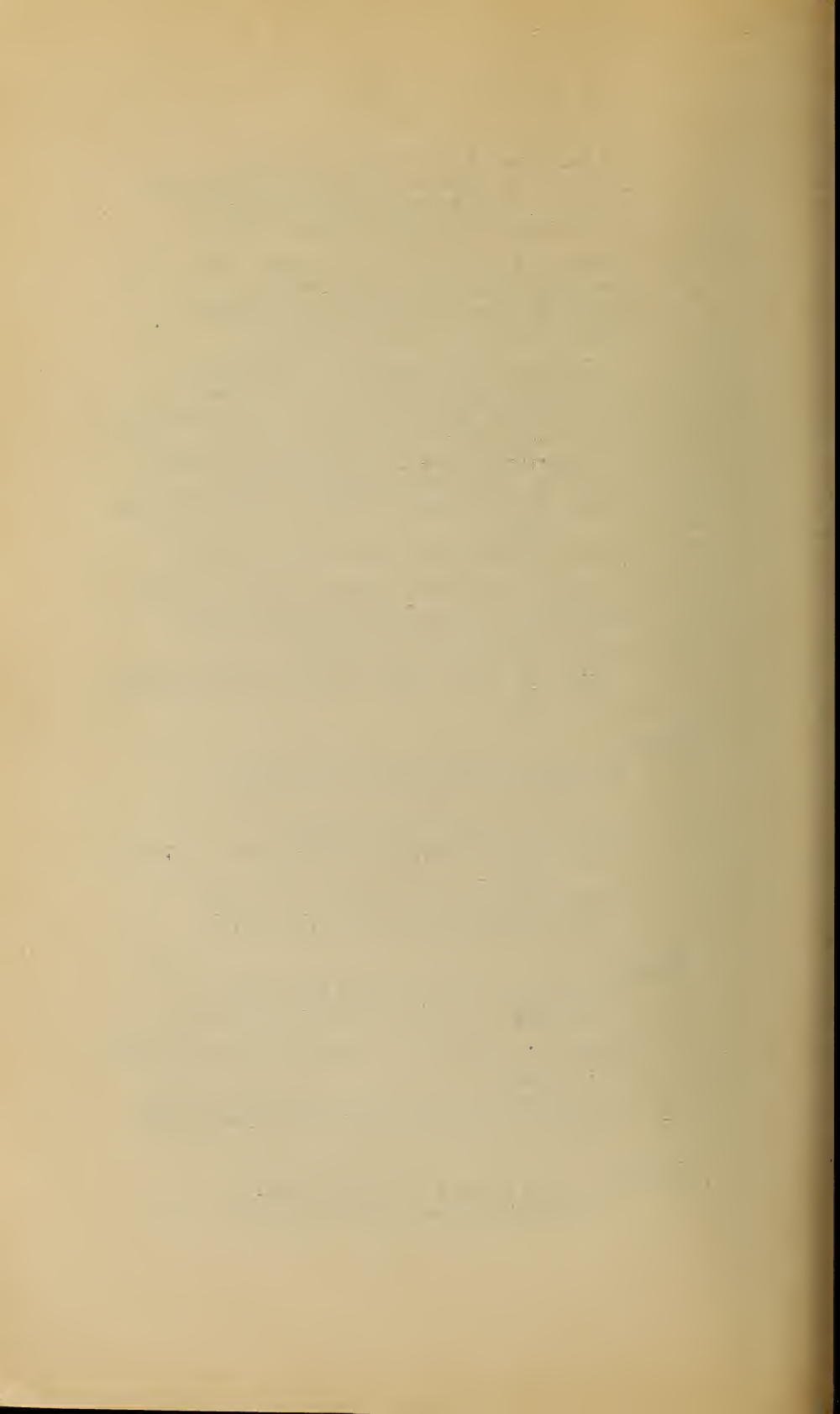
Jonson:

Yet Samson was triumphant in the end
And died to music of his foeman's groans.

Tall tree-tops reach to heights where winds blow
hard;
Great men are targets for the envious Fates
And they hunt giants with their keenest darts.

Bacon:

By noted lawyers I was often paid
In public, sums to meet the costs of court.



Such sums at times were paid direct by men
Who were themselves the parties to the suits:

It was the ancient custom in this realm
And, of the income of Lord Chancellors,
All did compute such monies the chief part
To bring it up to fifteen thousand pounds,—
The salary being eighty pounds and fees.

In strictest truth, these were the costs of court.
It was quite right that courts should have their
fees—

Though the amounts were not defined by law
But left to option of the litigants—

And so each one strove to outdo the rest
In compensation to the clerk and judge—
And therein was the sole indecorous part.

Of the six thousand judgments that I gave
Not one was ever altered on appeal;
And I am thus the only judge alive
Whose rulings were affirmed in every case:

But Egerton and others of his ilk,
Who had lost cases they tried in my court,
Went before Parliament with these attacks
Claiming that they had bribed me as a judge:
Had they bribed me, they never would have lost.

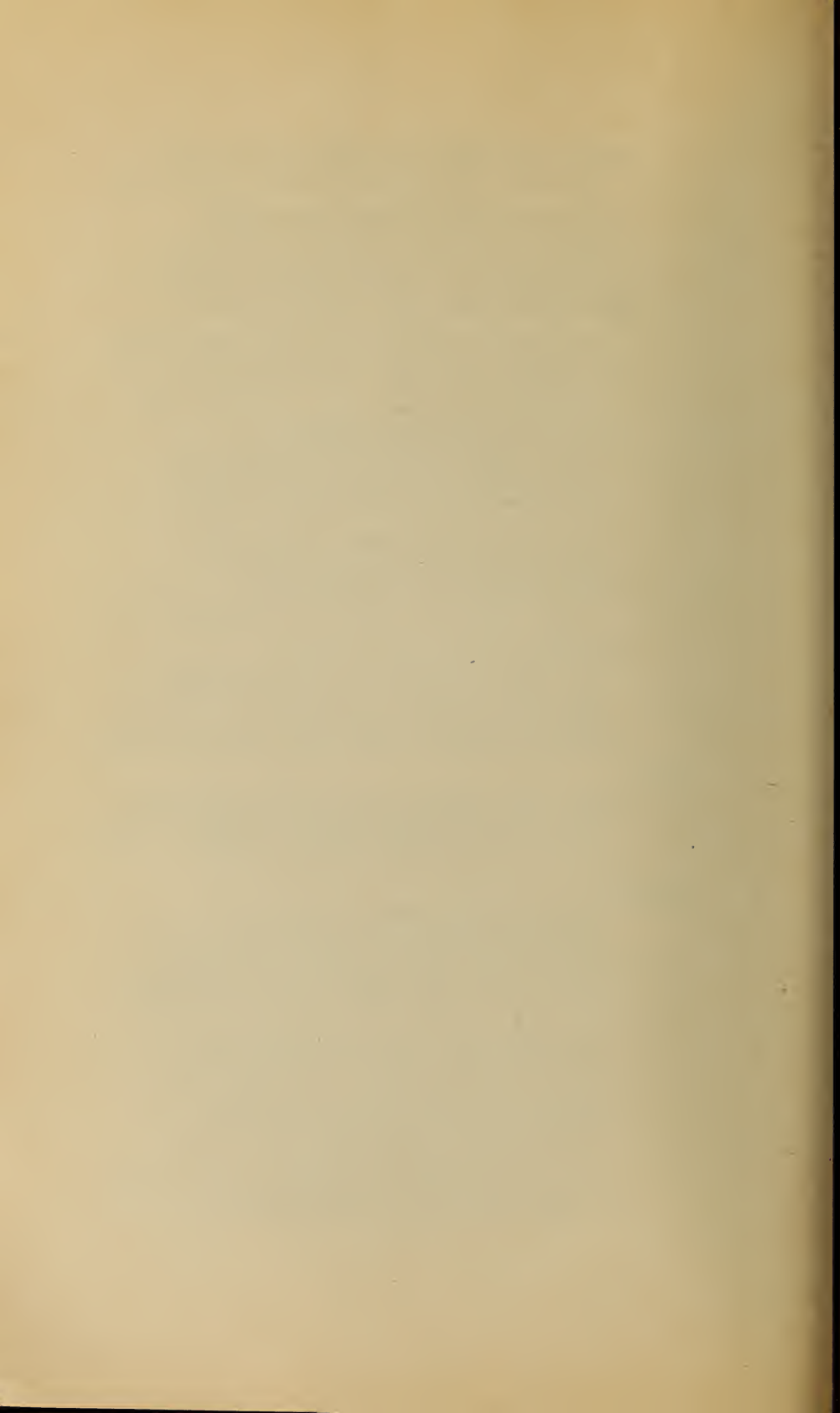
Jonson:

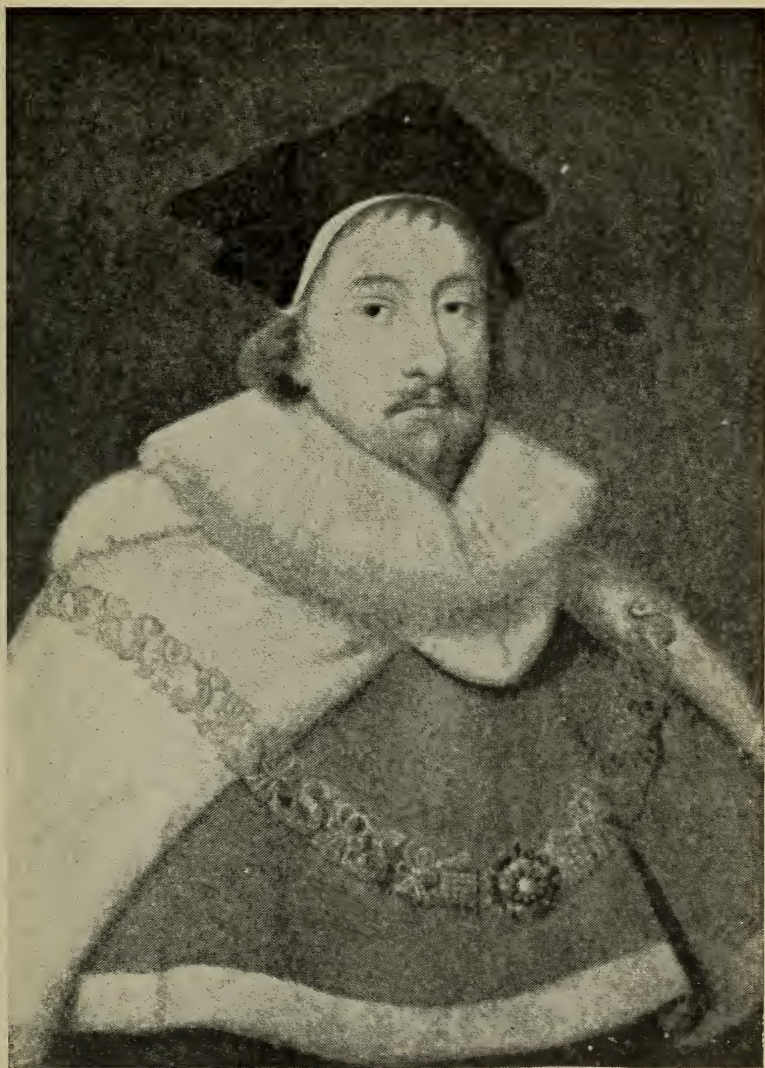
These facts should surely have availed to save
You from the charge that you had taken bribes.
A briber self-confessed is self-impeached.

Bacon:

It happened that abuses of gross kind
Done by the pampered favorite of the King,
Were likewise then the subject of complaint
In the same Parliament which entertained
The bribery charges which my foes had made.

It needed oil to still this troubled sea;
And so the King and my Lord Buckingham,
(As I discovered later to my cost,)
Decreed my ruin for two reasons, first—
That I should be the scapegoat to allay
The irritated temper of the mob,
And, second, that they might vacate my place
So they could sell it for the highest bid.





SIR EDWARD COKE
After the Original Portrait by Jansen



To a Scotch ear, no music is so sweet
As is the canny clink of coin on coin.

The King told me to put in no defense—
To let the Parliament do what it chose—
And pawned his honor to me that he would
Protect me and my name from any harm.

Though led by Coke with diabolic craft
My enemies could find no wrong in me,
And not one case of bribery was shown,
Though every day some moneys had been paid
To me or to officials of my court
As voluntary fees but not as bribes.

By the harsh judgment which was rendered then
I have been pilloried before the world
As an unfaithful public servant, who
Took bribes, as the Iscariot of the bench.

Jonson:

Like favors like—in every age, men cry
“Christ to the cross, but set Barrabas free!”

Bacon:

The men who voted thus to brand my name
Did me a wrong they did not understand:
They were unjust because they did not know
The right from wrong—the just from the unjust.

Much cruelty from ignorance has sprung—
It dulls men's senses to the harm they do:

Wrongdoers are not monsters as a rule—
The weaklings are bad more from lack of sense.

Jonson:

Why did the King not interpose to save
Your fortunes and your honor at that time?

Bacon:

James is the sole son of the Stuart line
Who ever had a coward's craven heart:
(It came to him prenataly, because
His gravid mother saw young Rizzio slain.)

And thus the King left me to writhe alone
For these two years since that fell day of shame,
Not daring to make good his plighted word
Lest he incur the anger of the Duke
Who had received ten thousand pounds as pay





KING JAMES I.
(After Portrait by Paul Van Somer)



From him he had the King to name for judge
As my successor on the Chancery Bench.

But now I have cleared nearly all the way,
By heavy sacrifices I have made,
For re-appointment to my former rank,
And so to have that undeserved disgrace
Wiped from the blackboard of the public mind.

I am assured the King will soon do this;
But there is one great service you can add
To force him sooner thus to act the man—

Jonson:

Your chief mistake was when you, at the first,
Made no defense—a lamb beneath the knife.
If God doth chasten those He loves the best,
His fondness for you must be great indeed.

Bacon:

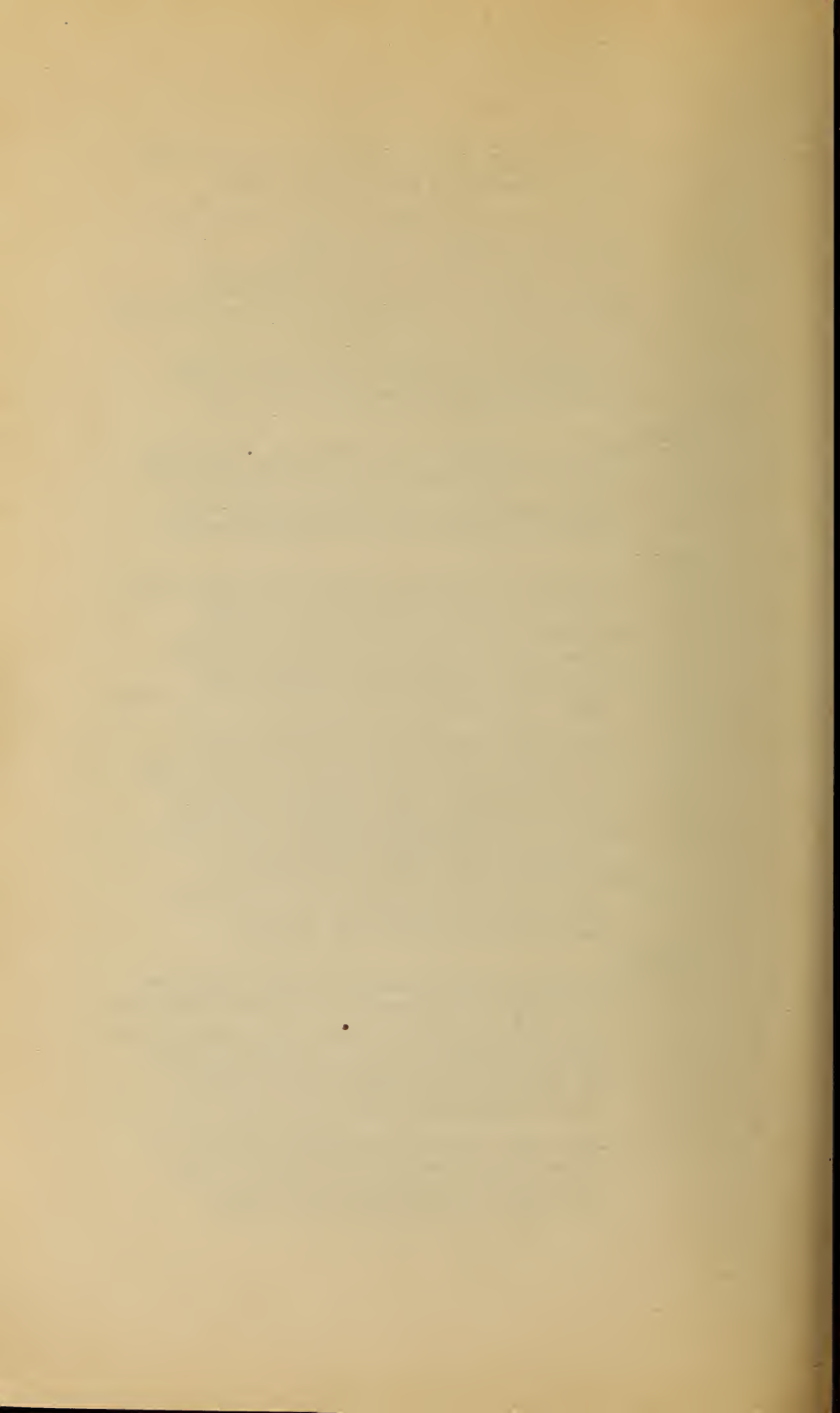
I learned the Duke and King were both resolved
To force a verdict against me of guilt—
So, when the order came for me to yield,
There was no other course for me to take,
As it would certainly have cost my head
Had I thrown down the gauntlet to King James.

In this, they treated me as they had done
To Suffolk, for whose place as Treasury Lord,
The greedy Duke had twenty thousand pounds
From Montagu. So Yelverton, likewise,
From his Attorney-Generalship was forced,
That this same Villiers band might sell his post
To Coventry, as pirates sell their loot.

This way at least I came out with my life,
And so survive to rectify my wrongs.

Jonson:

As long as I have strength to wield my sword
Or brain to guide my pen, command them both.
The Cecils barred, with lies, your upward course
When the She-eagle was our kingly Queen—
Fell jealousy has prompted men to wrong
Since earliest time when Cain took Abel's life.
And, when this Scot (unstable yet perverse)
Came here by malice of the unkind Fates,
Your merits, which surpass all other men's,
Had still a recognition all too slight.



Everyone knows that, for five hundred years,
Our judges were accustomed to take gifts
And that it universally was deemed
A legal though elastic scale of fees.

But by the treachery of our royal knave
You then were thrown as sop to Cerberus
To pacify the people, and protect
The Duke of Buckingham from public wrath
In keeping hidden the nefarious means
By which his prodigalities were fed.

Bacon :

No other one but you on English soil
Would dare to speak with such unbridled tongue
About His Majesty.

Jonson :

Kings are but men gold-gilt,
Made of plain clay like all of Adam's race;
And our King James is a pedantic fool
Unfit to be a Justice of the Peace;
And yet we bow before these man-made kings
As did the Israelites of olden time
Before the golden calf their hands had shaped.

And James, in turn, crouches before the Duke
Like suppliant dog before his master's whip,
And he, in fact, has all of a dog's traits
Save gratitude.

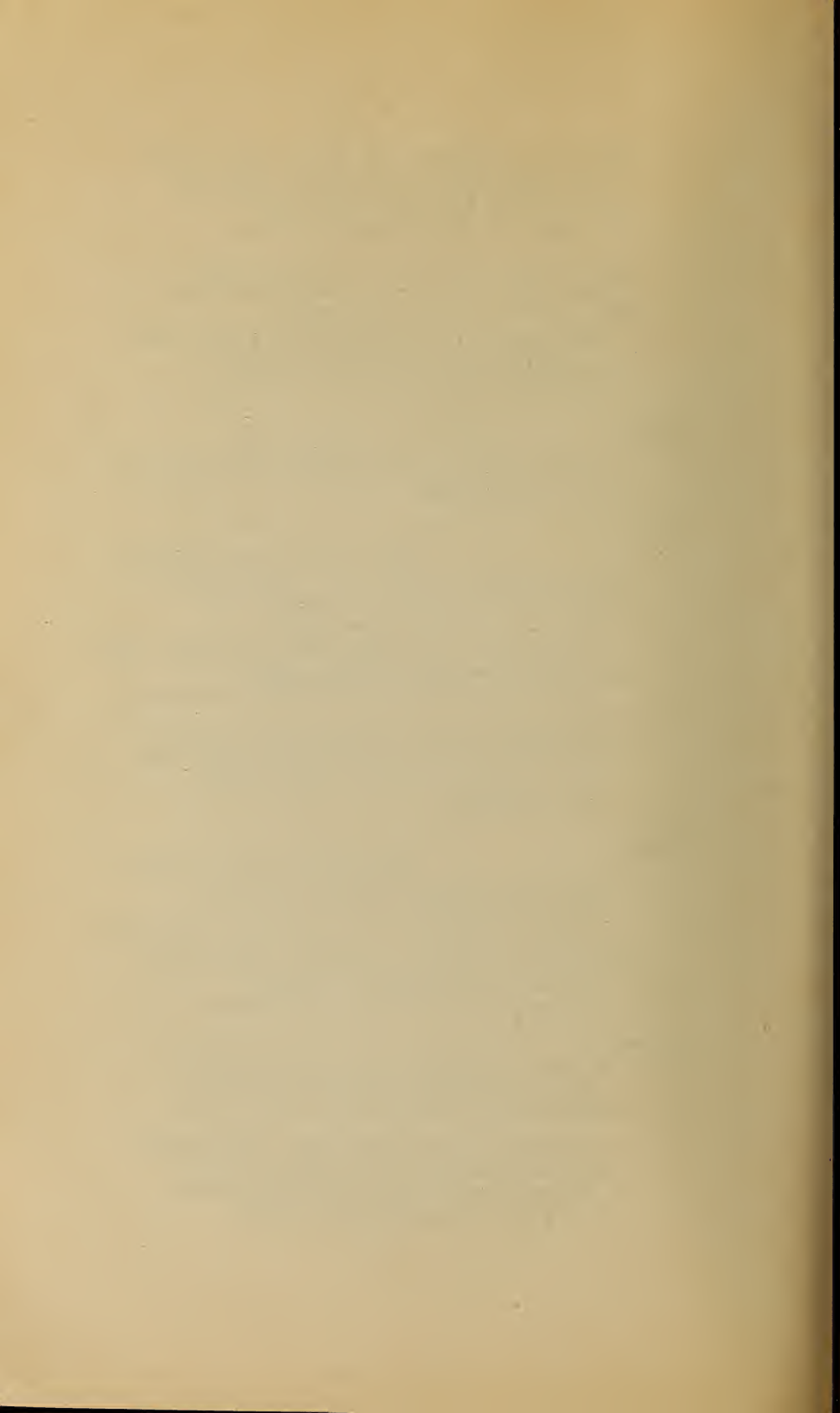
Bacon :

Knowledge, in time to come,
Will rend asunder fetters now about
The minds of men. In this submissive age
Kings are deemed gods. Even our best divines
Preach that a King is God's vice-regent here,
And call it sacrilegious to impute
A human weakness to one on the throne.

Jonson :

All lawyers' minds to precedent are wed.
If you revere old nonsense for its age
Why not bow down to Juno and to Jove?

In what way can I serve you? Rest assured
The service will most cheerfully be done—
For you are the one man, in all the land,
To whom I will subordinate myself.



I look upon our idle men of rank
As barren fig-trees cumbering the ground,
Or crumbling hulks in a Sargasso Sea
Where sloth breeds barnacles upon the brain:
We all spring from the gardener of old:
When Adam roamed through Eden with his
bride,
Their fig leaves bore no herald's coat of arms.

The only eminence which I revere
Is aristocracy of mental wealth.

Bacon:

If man live for the sake of joy or peace,
Then mental wealth is not the road thereto.

The tree of knowledge bears a much-mixed fruit,
Which sometimes poisons human love and hope

Jonson:

Grim disappointment lurks behind hope's mask
And love is only the instinct of sex.

Bacon:

Let not your words be pessimistic, for
It is the badge of failure and despair—

Jonson:

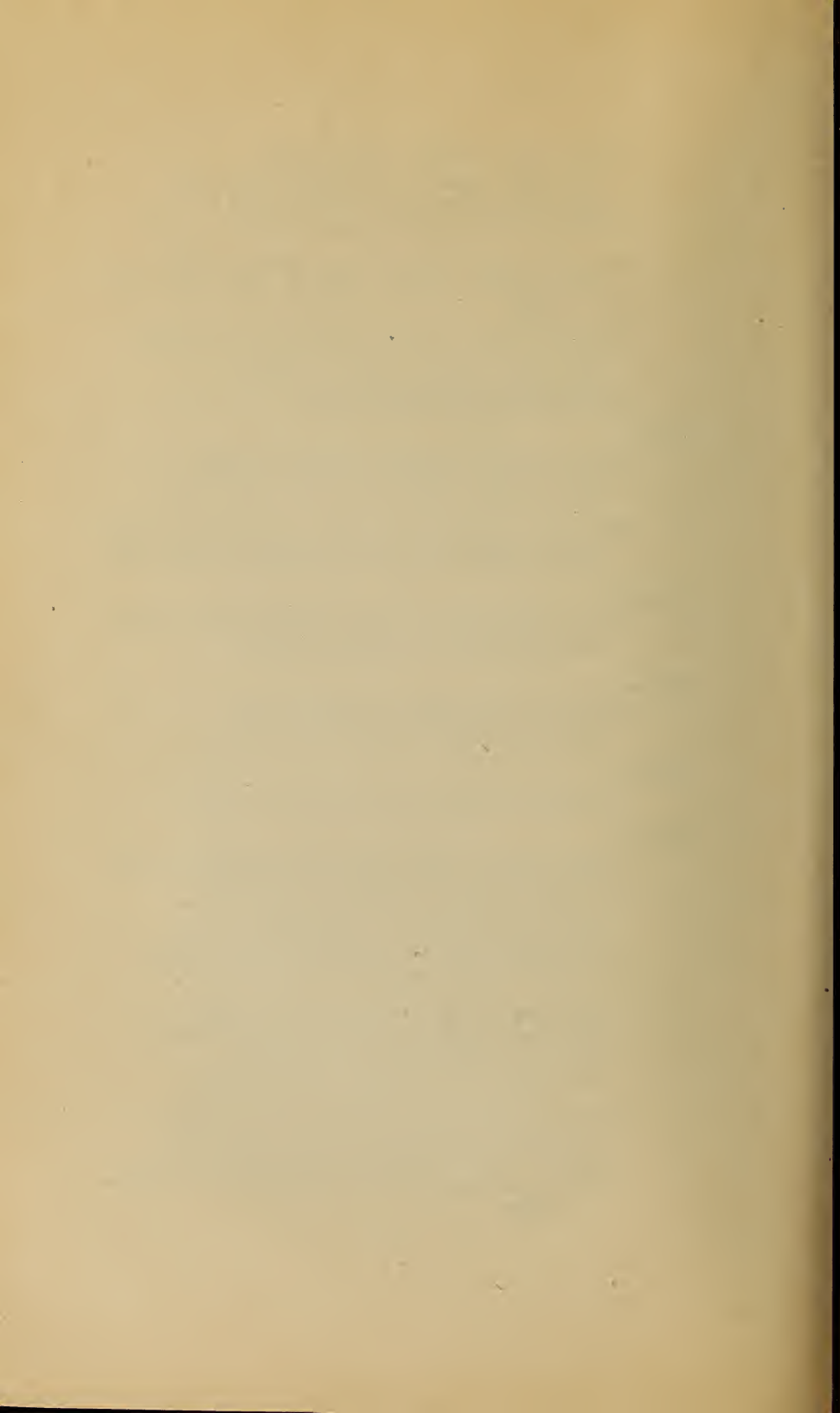
You have not told me what it is you wish.

Bacon:

Those dramas which I put in Shakespeare's name,
Contain some lines his Majesty dislikes.
In various of them, kings are plainly shown
As tottering with the weaknesses of men;
And certain queens are pictured, in my plays,
As not in temperament as chaste as ice.

The second Richard is portrayed to hold
The crown of England by a doubtful right;
And various other matter grate upon
The fancy of the harsh, censorious Scot.

Among the rest, my reverence for the Church
Appears in what I say of friars and nuns;
And knowledge of the law and Scriptures show
Tastes not possessed by Shakespeare's bookless
class.



Jonson :

But only you and I and Shakespeare knew
Those various plays were products of your pen.

Bacon :

His Majesty is sometimes strangely shrewd.
He winked and said the plays, throughout,
disclose

A knowledge universal, clothed in words
Used only by men in high walks of life.

Though neither good nor great, the King is yet
Well read in literature of ancient days,
And he has craftily discovered that
I made an error of one word where I,
In the play Troilus and Cressida,
Did quote, from Aristotle, a short phrase
And that the same mistake was made by me,
In quoting the same words in my own name,
In one of my own philosophic books.

James says the author's feelings towards the mob
Show kindly pity, mingled with distaste—
Well-bred aversion of a high-grade man—
And not such kinship as Shakespeare would feel
For the plebeian class from which he sprung.

James also notes that our ancestral home,
Saint Albans, is named three and twenty times;
But no allusion is made anywhere
To Stratford-upon-Avon, in the plays.

Jonson :

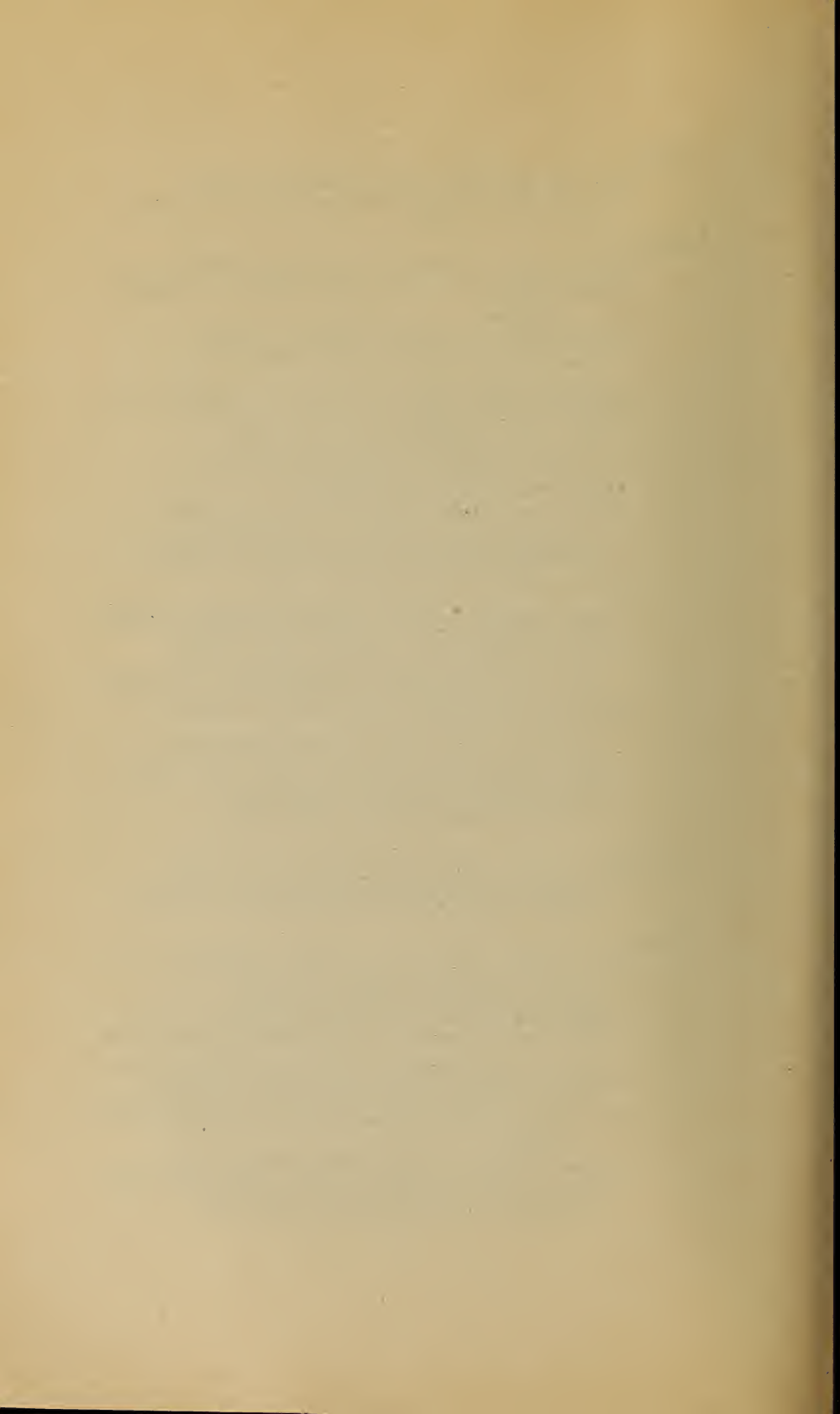
I thought the King had scarcely sense enough
To draw such shrewd conclusions as to facts.

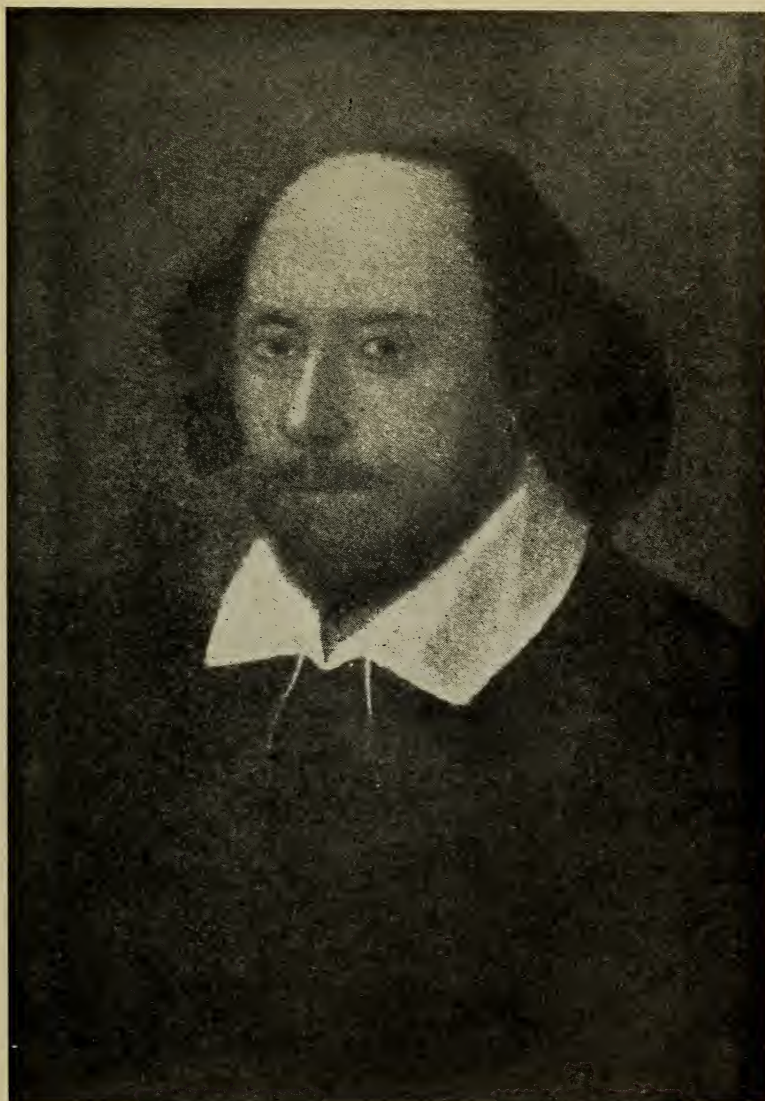
Bacon :

He has the canny instinct of the Scotch ;
And his belief in sanctity of kings
Makes him fanatic in his zeal to learn
The actual source of those Shakespearean plays.

He knows that William Shakespeare left this place
When forty-five, and went to Warwickshire
To wring church tithes from the impoverished
boors,

At Stratford, a small, filthy, dingy hutch,
Where stupid peasants house themselves like sheep ;
And there devoted his best years of life





WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(After the Portrait by John Taylor, known as the
"Chandos" Portrait)

William Shakespeare



To tithing farmers' crops and bringing suits
For paltry sums of money claimed by him;
Remote from books and art, and drinking ale
With rude companions at the village inn,
His daily comrade being one John Combe,
A local usurer of bad repute,
Whom at his death he villified in rhymes
Such as no educated man would write.

Jonson :

How did the King learn incidents so small
As to a man whose life was thus obscure.

Bacon :

Since he conceived impression that I am
The real author of the Shakespeare plays,
He has neglected large affairs of state
To chase me through all burrowings, ferret-like;
He sent a messenger to Shakespeare's home
To secretly investigate all things
In any wise pertaining to poor Will.

An idea, much nursed by a narrow mind,
Moves in and drives all other tenants out:

An egotist, sodden with self-conceit,
Is as suspicious as a jealous wife.

Jonson :

What learned he else through this persistent
search?

Bacon :

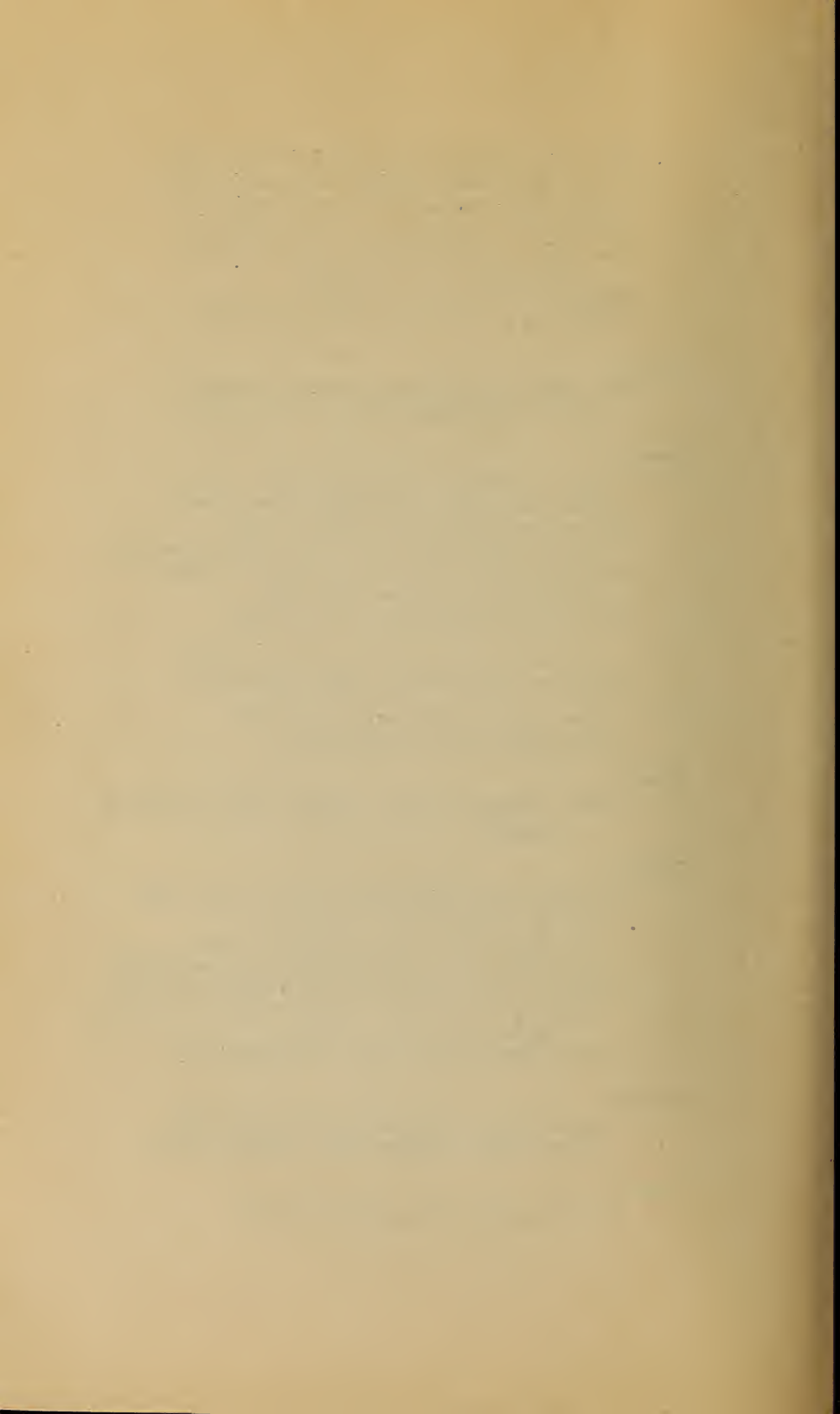
He found that Shakespeare died six years ago,
At the untimely age of fifty-two,
The victim of an illness caused by drink,
And left some worthless doggerel to be carved
Upon his tomb, though he had pledged his word
That he would write naught which would thus
betray
His painful lack of skill in English verse.

Jonson :

James may have found out, for it is a fact,
That thrifty William never owned a book.

Bacon :

He knows that inferentially because



He learned that, at the Shakespeare home, there
are

No books whatever, nor a written word
Of any nature, howsoever slight—

Nor is there, in this city or elsewhere,

A single scrap of paper to be found
That bears his composition in the form
Of letters sent to literary men

Or manuscripts or other line he wrote.

The secret agent while there saw his will

And also two conveyances of land;
These show his signature an uncouth scrawl
As made by hand unused to wield the pen.

The will, which sets forth fully all he left,

Even to beds and things of table use,
Contains no word of books or any plays;
And while it gives the names of various friends,
Makes mention of no literary man.

James also learned that both his parents were
Illiterate as the cows and goats they milked.

His daughter, Judith, married to a man
Of lowest station, cannot write her name.

The agent found, by looking at the will,

The Stratford scrivener, who drafted it,
Supposed that Shakespeare could not write, for he
Used the concluding words—"Witness my
seal"—

The form used for those who cannot make wills
By their own "hands"—with their self-written
names.

Jonson:

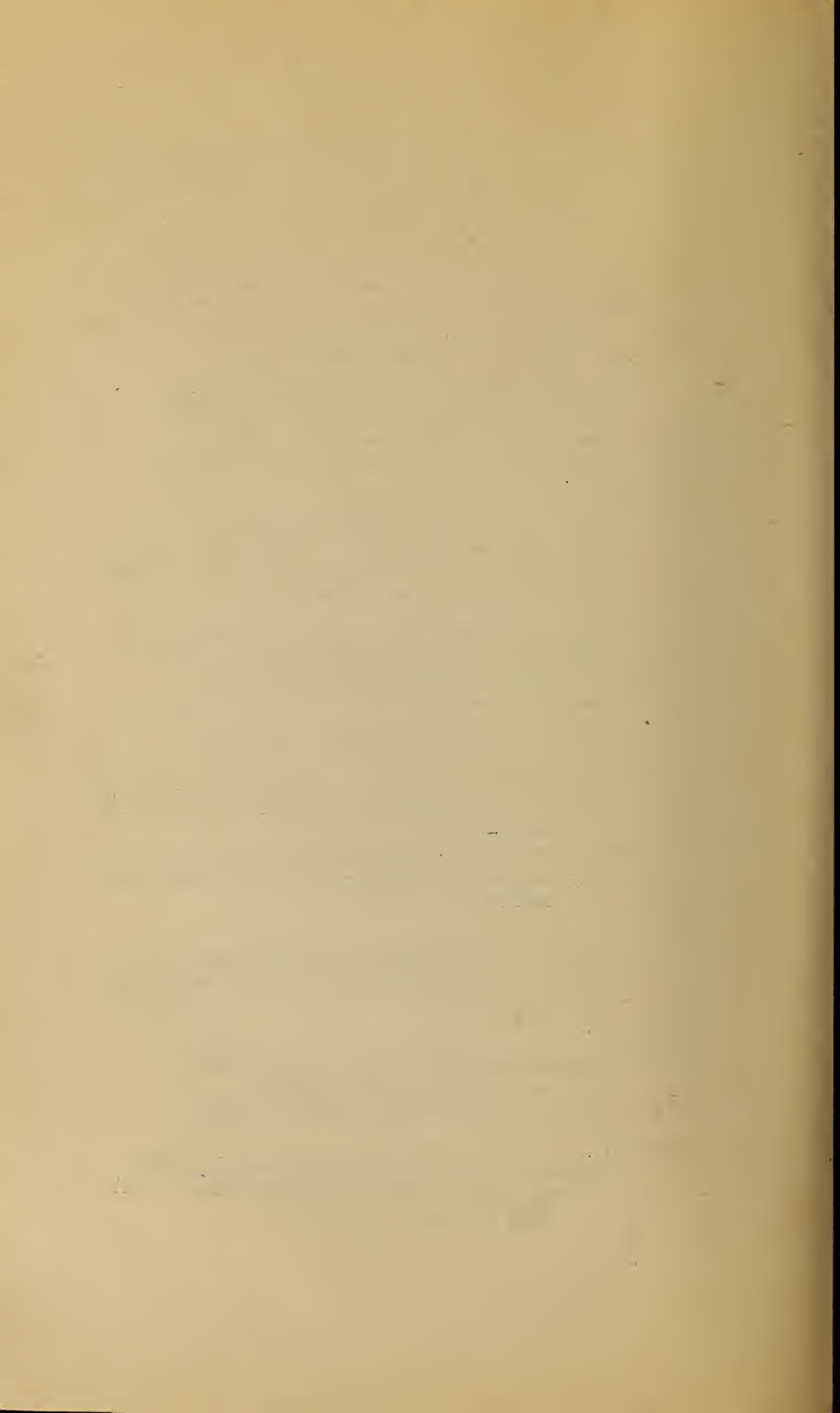
'Tis not surprising that our nosing King
Thinks, behind Shakespeare, lurks some larger
man.

Bacon:

The King is on the verge of strong dislike
Of me, as guilty of lese majeste
Beneath the cloaking of another's name.

Jonson:

I oft have laughed to think how the play-folk
Would praise Will Shakespeare that no line
was changed



In copies which he brought them of the plays.

I've laughed because those copies were by me.
(And many a guinea that I needed much

I have received from you for that same work,
Lest your handwriting should disclose you wrote
Stage-plays, in derogation of your name
As public man, philosopher and judge.)

Bacon:

But you and I know alterations must
Be always made in writings of high class—
(You recollect what Horace says). I'm sure
I made full many a change as I wrote mine:
Some of my books I re-wrote twenty times.

In matters literary, as all else,
Man's industry is handmaid of success.

No literary work spontaneous springs
From human brain, perfect in every part
Like wise Minerva from the head of Jove.

Jonson:

When you and I discourse together, we
Find many things to talk of. I am pleased
To think it shows a kinship in our minds,
That each wakes thought in each.

Our talk runs on
As runs a babbling brook that winds in curves,
And is, through windings, slow to reach the end.

Tell me what service I can render you?
I only gather that it has to do,
In some connection, with the Shakespeare plays.

Bacon:

It has—you were in close contact with Will
Until his death. It was at his desire
That his theatre partners staged your play.
In fact, you knew him intimately well
In business and in bacchanal excess,
And are in truth the only cultured man
With whom the dead man was not at arm's length.

Jonson:

The bond between us was that vinous bond
Which sometimes links men in all else unlike.

Bacon:

By acting through a confidential friend

I have arranged for a revised reprint
Of all my plays that stand in Shakespeare's
name,

For preservation till I call them mine.

And some strange secrets are encrypt therein,
(Like Pharaoh's jewels in the pyramids,)
It will some day amaze the world to find
When studious men shall think my methods out:
My mind has revelled in these cryptograms
From boyhood, when I made my first in France.

Jonson:

And where does old Ben Jonson get his cue?

Bacon:

I wish you to write laudatory lines
On Shakespeare as the author of the plays
For publication with this first reprint;
When these he reads, our jealous king at once
Will give me back the post they robbed me of.

He deems you too blunt not to be sincere
And will dismiss the doubts he has of me.

Jonson:

By Jove, and all the other gods at once,
It is a capital and novel jest
That you and I, in this way, should conspire
To falsely keep upon a dead man's head
A chaplet which should now adorn your brow.

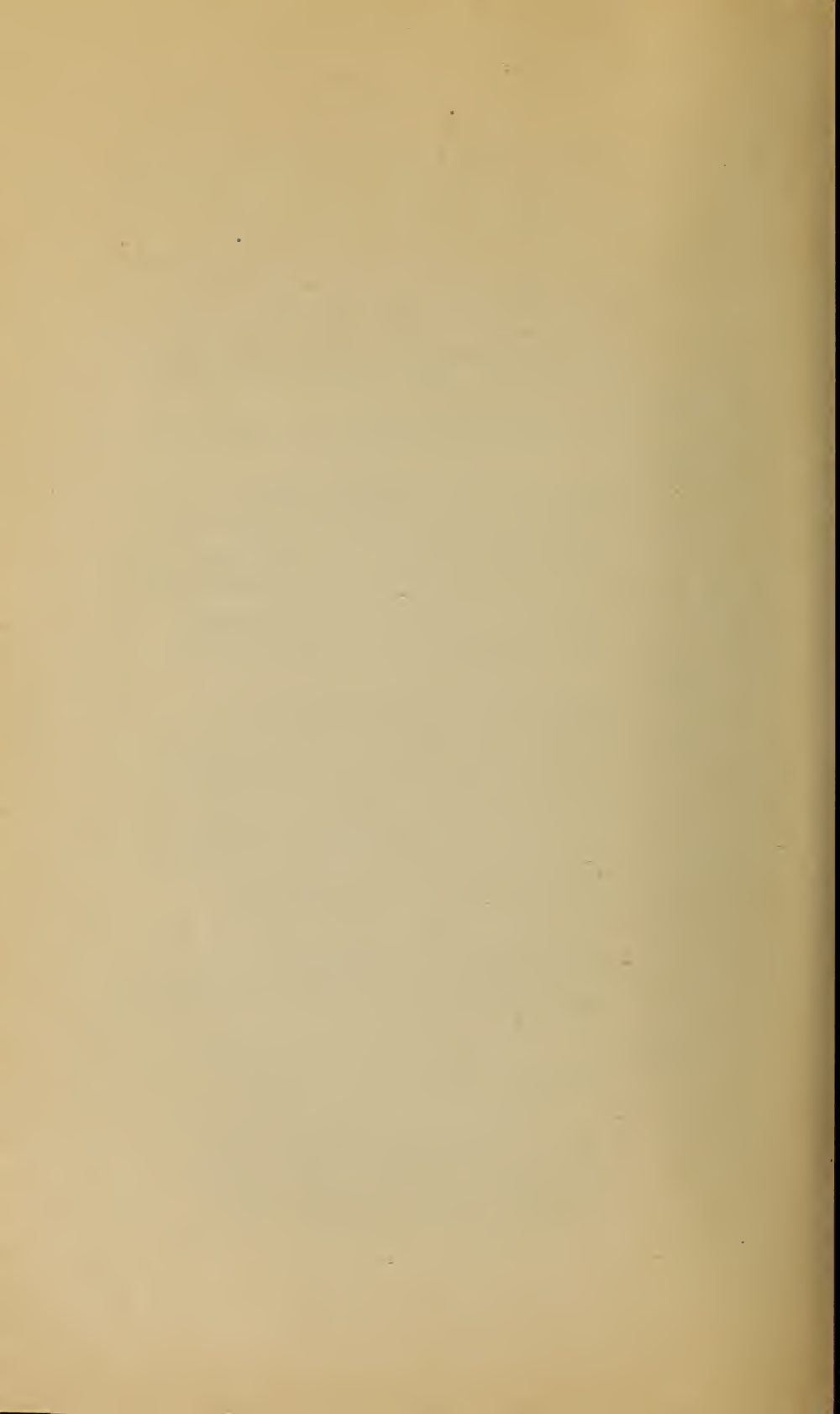
I would be more proud to have held the pen
That wrote the sorrows of the princely Dane,
The Tempest, Lear or story of the Moor
Than to be wearer of the British crown:

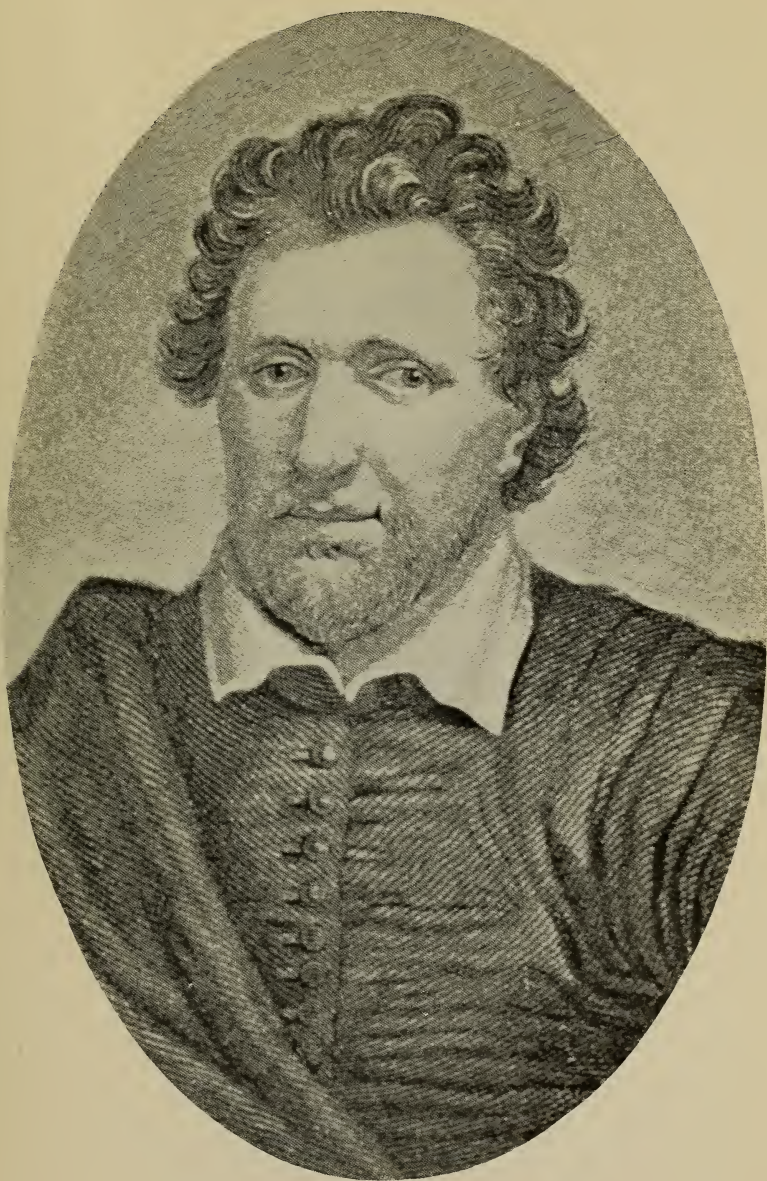
The highest rank capricious Fate can give
Is paltry to the glory for all time
That must come to the author of those plays,—
Those rich crown-jewels of the throne of thought.

Bacon:

This matter will not fail to right itself:
Eternity is long, and it is mine.

Let me first have my reputation cleared
By restoration to the Chancery bench,
And then, with evidence at my command,
I readily can prove I wrote the plays
When it becomes expedient so to do.





BEN JONSON
(After Original Portrait in Bodleian Library)

Ben: Jonson.



The Prince of Wales is my most faithful friend
(I dedicated to him, by his leave,
My lately published life of Henry Seventh)
And it is my intention to disclose
My true connection with the Shakespeare plays,
As soon as death shall rid us of King James,
Which, in the course of nature, must be soon.

Johnson :

Then all the world will laugh to think how far
They went astray in thinking wondrous works
Could be composed by such a man as that
Whose day-time thoughts were all for getting
gain
And night-time thoughts for riotous excess.

Bacon :

Then men will say that Francis Bacon's mind
Had many facets, like some changeful gem,
In that his pen could weave, with easy skill,
Airy creations of the poet's art,
No less than build the stately edifice
Of weightier and more meritorious thought.

But now the woe which overwhelms my soul
Is that all tongues throughout this tattling
world,

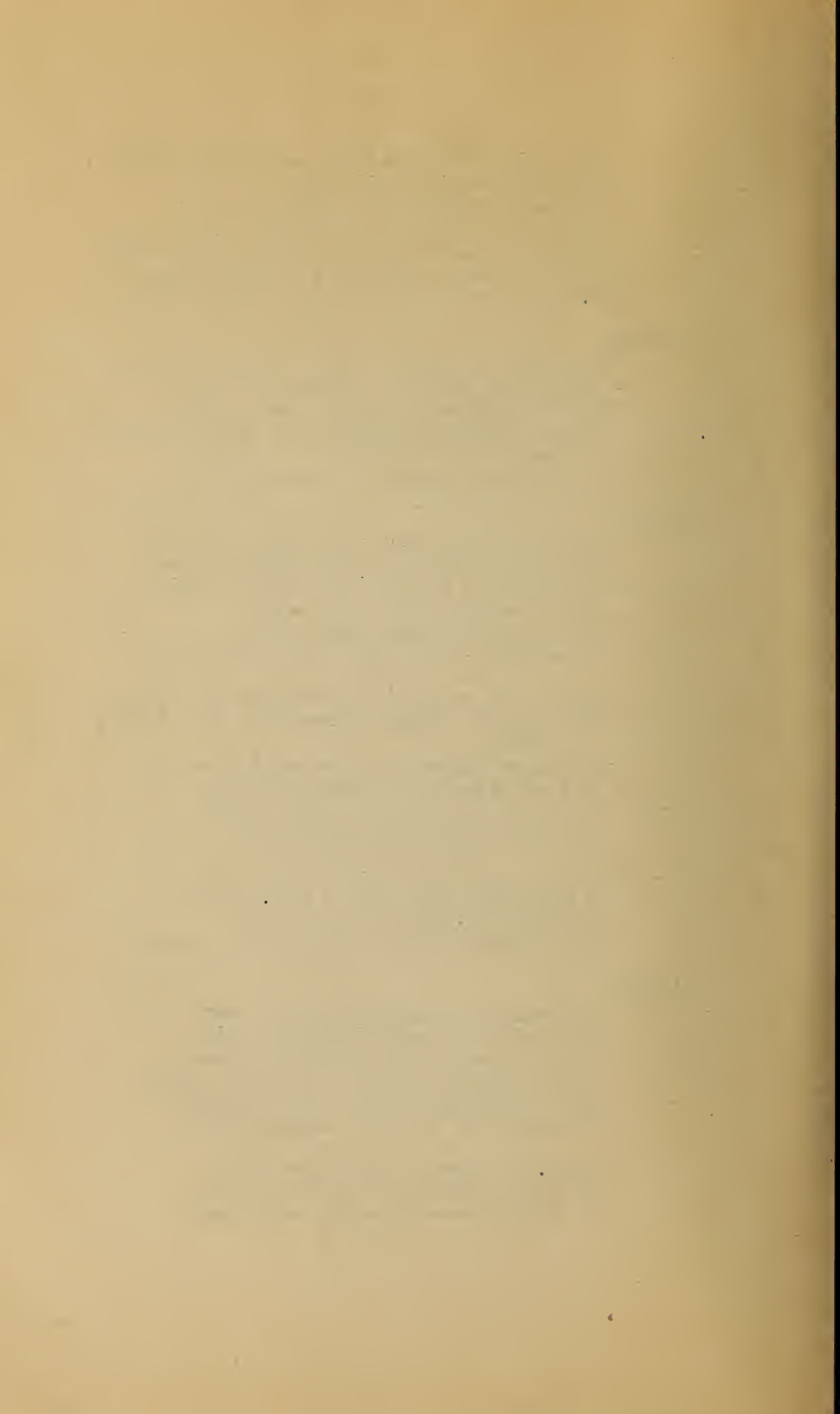
Say Francis Bacon bears the brand of crime,
A base embezzler of judicial trust—
A traitor to the God-like post of judge—
A crucified Barrabas of the bench.

To free myself from that degrading charge
I cheerfully could wield a torch to burn
All writings I or others ever penned
Since Cadmus first invented making books.

Jonson :

To write what you desire will be a task,
Yet I will write according to your wish.
But verses hard to write are hard to read;
And I foresee my lines will be but strained,
And will disclose, in spite of all my pains,
That they are born of a reluctant Muse.

I am quite willing to deceive the King
If it will cause him to be just to you :
'Tis right to meet deception with deceit.



But, thinking of Miranda and Cordelia,
Of Desdemona, Imogen and Portia,
Of Rosalind, Viola and Perdita,
Of sad Ophelia and of Isabella
And the remainder of the women sweet
You have depicted in your various plays
Makes hard my task to write of Shakespeare's as
The magic pen that gave them deathless life,
For in my days of revelry, I knew
The sort of women his thoughts dwelt upon.
(Exeunt.)

ACT V.

SCENE 1. A Bed Chamber. A. D. 1626.

(Bacon on a couch, attended by a physician.)

Bacon:

I fear that, while I was in that long swoon,
You did wrong to take so much blood from me.

The Physician:

'Tis set down as an axiom in our books
That fever and inflammatory ills
Lurk in the blood; it is a river Styx
On which disease, like Charon, carries death:
It throws the body into fiery heat
And, save we free the over-crowded veins,
Will parch the very citadel of life.

Bacon:

You burglarize the vital citadel
And steal its greatest treasure in the blood.

But I feel strangely free from any pain—
Is this not life's surrender to disease?
Tell me the truth, am I not dying now?

The Physician:

My lord, you will be dead within an hour.

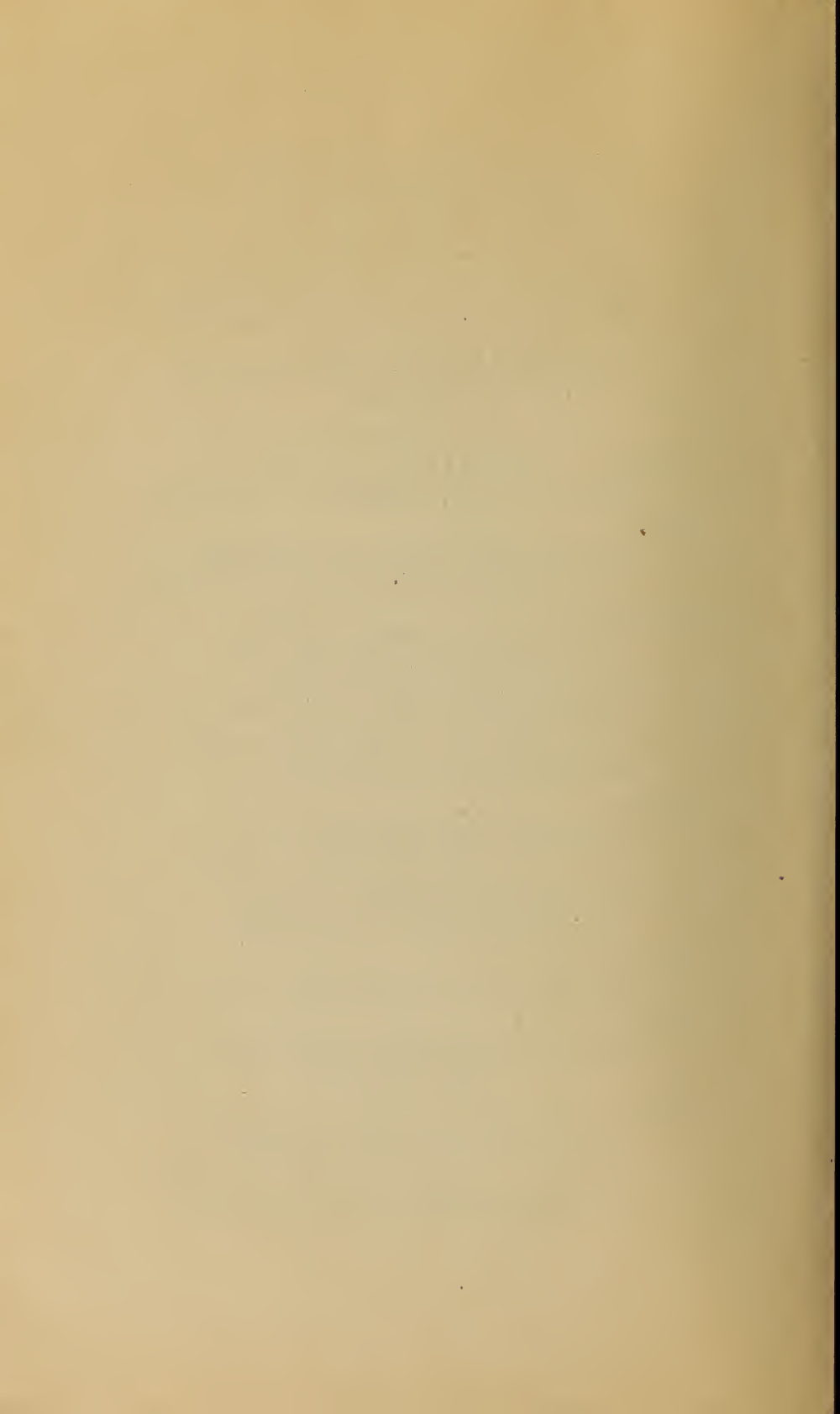
Bacon:

Then let me die, as I have lived,—alone.
(Exit Physician.)

Bacon:

And so my cause will soon be on appeal
Before the bar of the Eternal Judge!

Alas, my past is strewn with shipwrecked hopes!
At court the Cecils thwarted every plan,



And stood between me and the Queen's goodwill;
And, when the Scottish James came to the
 throne,
And I was raised up to the Chancery bench,
I was again the plaything of the Fates
As scapegoat for the Duke of Buckingham.

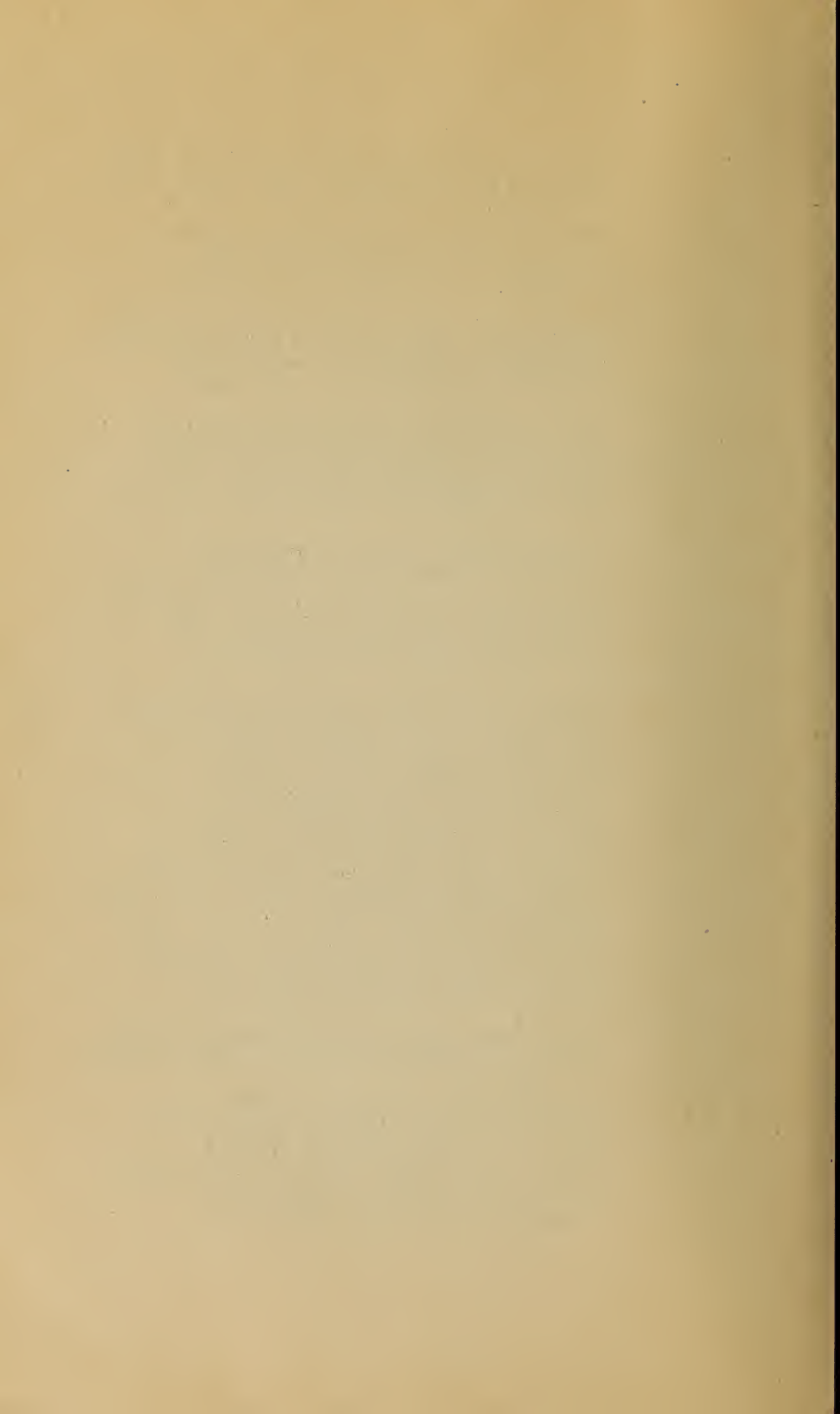
In my bright youth, when all within me glowed
With hope and pride and joy of conscious strength
By fortune's fellest blow, I was deprived
Of her who was predestined as my mate.

Her sweetness and her gentleness and truth,
Her gracious womanhood and archness shy
Were set within her beauteous form and face
Like rarest jewels set in purest gold.

I lost her then but not for evermore—
Love is divine and yields not unto death:
We love so much, we can constrain the Fates,
And still can sway the future by our wills;
And, by the magnetism of that love,
Find, each the other, in the fields of space.

While now from life I'm drifting fast away,
There wakes in me a strange prophetic gift
And, in the panorama of the years,
The swiftly coming centuries unfold:
In other lands, I see a nation rise
Of our own Anglo-Celtic blood, but free
From burdens of this soul-depressing age—
A wondrous race, where now wild Indians roam:
A race inspired by thoughts this cold hand wrote,
And mightier far than these, its parent isles:
And there I see my name loved and revered
As one who labored, both in prose and verse,
To lift to higher planes his fellow-men.

I crave some rest; for heart and brain are tired.
Some great things I have done: I have thought
 out
Full many a secret by coy nature hid
Within her deep, capacious, virgin breast;
And, as the servant of the human race
Have written many books on many themes:
But, of the varied powers I hold in trust,
I fear I have not made sufficient use.



My next life will redeem the faults of this;
For well I know that I shall live again.
If shrivelled wheat, in exhumed mummies' hands,
Will germinate beneath the sun's warm kiss,
How much more will the soul of man awake
And live again, responsive to God's smile!

O Mary, type of holy motherhood!
O martyred Christ, who wept at human woe!
O God Omnipotent, whose eye doth note
The sparrow's fall, look down with tender heart
On Francis Bacon, dying here alone!
And in that sphere where all mistakes are plain
And darkness is lost in Thy radiant light;
Where man can see himself as Thou doth see;
And become God-like, being close to God;
Grant that the wisdom I have sought so long
May yet illumine my liberated soul,
And that, when I have read the mystic scroll
Of future life, my mind may still progress,
So that at last all knowledge shall be mine!

(Dies.)

FINIS.

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